

REACHING MILLENNIAL MOMS:
A SEASON OF OPPORTUNITY FOR THE CHURCH

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To my husband Daniel and the three little miracles we created together.

Thank you for the gift of this season.

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ABSTRACT

This research project was conducted to examine the Millennial Generation and their faith practices, with particular interest in discovering why many Millennials are leaving the faith, why some Millennials are returning to Christianity, and if the specific life season of having children can be leveraged by the church to help new moms find significant Christian community and church involvement.

CHAPTER ONE

LAKE FOREST CHURCH

Setting: The City

Huntersville, North Carolina, is a suburb of Charlotte. It was the first town to pop up north of Charlotte along the edge of Lake Norman. It was incorporated in 1873 as people moved there for the fertile land and proximity to a rail line.

Many young families are flocking to Huntersville. Financially it makes sense for families to move there. Huntersville is home to many national and international companies such as Rubbermaid and Novant Health, and there is an abundance of jobs at entry level and management level. The median household income in 2014 was \$96,000 a year, almost double the average of the state. The cost of living index is 93.6 which is less than the US average of 100. Housing is affordable and homes continue to increase in value.¹

Besides financial reasons, it is a safe and fun place for a family to spend time. It has been recognized for its safety multiple years in a row and was ranked on Safe Wise's Top 20 Safest Cities List in North Carolina in 2017. On most weekends there are festivals and seasonal activities. There are places to hike, play sports, go to the movies, and shop. The town has many acclaimed preschool facilities. In 2016, Huntersville was voted number two on Wallet Hub's Best Places to Raise a Family.²

1. "Why Huntersville", accessed July 29, 2019, <https://www.huntersville.org/>.

2. "Why Huntersville".

Because of this, the population of Huntersville continues to grow. In 2014 the population was 51,567. This was a growth of 106.6 percent since the year 2000.³

Charlotte is conveniently located just 12 miles to the south and is also experiencing a population boom. Charlotte is the largest city in North Carolina and the second largest in the Southeast. The metropolitan area has almost 2.4 million people. It is currently the third fastest-growing major US city and is expected to continue to grow by 47 percent every year.⁴

The landscape of religion will morph as more people move into Charlotte and the surrounding suburbs like Huntersville. From the years 2000 to 2010, the number of evangelical protestants in Charlotte rose from 128,552 people to 204,287 people. The number of Catholics and mainline protestants rose a minimal amount. The largest jump came from those who claimed “none” as their choice of religion. The “nones” grew from 233,042 to 444,262. Of the population, 48.1 percent claimed no religion. Evangelical protestants made up 22.2 percent of the population.⁵

Setting: The Church

Lake Forest Church (LFC) sits in the middle of Huntersville. The church was planted in 1998 by senior pastor, Mike Moses, and is part of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

Because Mike Moses believes it is important for churches to be planting churches, LFC has been planting churches every few years and incorporating them into their Lake Forest

3. “City Data”, accessed July 29, 2019, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Huntersville-North-Carolina.html>.

4. “World Population Review”, accessed July 29, 2019, <http://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/charlotte-population/>.

5. “City-Data.”.

family of churches. There are currently over 2,000 people who worship weekly at one of the 4 campuses. The majority of these people are at the Huntersville campus.

The mission of the church is “loving people as they discover and live out their role in God’s story.” From the stage, the staff is continually reminding people that they are “a place for those who have given up on church but not on God.” They are also repeatedly reminding their congregants to be looking for their “one more person.” This one more person is an individual that they know and are building relationship with, in hopes that they can show them the love of Christ and perhaps invite them to church.

On a Sunday morning the halls of LFC are filled with little kids. On a typical Sunday there will be about 200 children younger than five years old. There are also usually pregnant women who look like they could have a baby at any moment.

Every day of the week there is a coffee house that was opened in the community space that LFC built in 2018. Many days this space is filled with people of all different ages and walks of life. There is a corner of the shop that has couches and children’s toys and it is rare to walk through the area and not find a group of moms and their young children.

The Need

Huntersville is seen as a wonderful place to raise a family and Lake Forest Church is a great place for those families to connect with each other. Families are coming to Lake Forest and they continue to grow. Christmas and Easter services have grown by 23 percent over the past two years.⁶ But is there more that the church could be doing for these young Millennial

6. Mike Moses, interview by author, Huntersville NC, July 30 2019.

families? The rate of growth of the church is large, but there are still so many people living in Huntersville. With almost half of those living in Charlotte claiming “none” as their religion, the field is wide open and there is a huge potential to love people as they discover and live out their role in God’s story.

Currently the church does not have a plan for women when they are pregnant or when they have a child. Starting a family is a huge life change for both men and women. What if there was something that the church could be doing to invite these women in and come alongside them as they are encountering such a pivotal life moment?

The Project

This project was inspired from statistics and trends concerning Millennials who are not a part of the church. Some of these are young adults who never attended a church and many are young adults who have left the church. Studies show that 66 percent of Millennials left the church when they graduated high school.⁷ Perhaps this generation will come to church as they start having families.

There is recent evidence that points to pivotal life moments as a time when people come to faith.⁸ Having a child is a pivotal life moment that the church can see coming in the lives of many Millennial women. Perhaps this huge life shift could be a time for the Millennial Generation to search for answers and find them in the church.

7. Rick Richardson, *You Found Me: New Research on How Unchurched, Nones, Millennials, and Irreligious Are Surprisingly Open to Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2019), location 658, Kindle.

8. Andy Stanley, *Deep and Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched and Churched People Love to Attend* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 109.

This project will focus on connecting Millennial moms into the local church. It will look specifically at the life phase of pregnancy and birth as a season to minister to these women in their time of need. These years can be especially stressful for women and the church could step up to be there to offer support. It is an opportunity for the church to combat stereotypes about Christians. According to Barna, 87 percent of Millennials who don't go to church view Christians as judgmental, 85 percent see Christians as hypocritical, and 70 percent see Christians as insensitive to others.⁹ Millennials also find it difficult to connect church to their real lives. Barna found that less than half of Millennials believe that they can be themselves at church. Only 54 percent believe that the church is relevant to their lives.¹⁰ This is a chance for women of all ages to look out for their "one more person" who is pregnant or has a young child. This is a small window with huge opportunities.

The specific project will be a devotional for new moms entitled *The Sisterhood of Motherhood: From our Momma Hearts to Yours*. It will feature 21 different entries from 21 different moms. Some of the stories will be ones of joy, some of the stories will be ones of hurt. There will be personal stories of death and miscarriage and personal stories of triumph. Some of these moms prayed for years before getting the gift of a baby and some of these moms were surprised with an unplanned pregnancy. Each story will be authentic and show the heart of one mom. There will also be a Bible verse with each entry so that new moms can cling to scripture and see what God has to say.

9. "What Millennials Want When They Visit Church", last modified July 29, 2015, accessed July 29, 2019, <https://www.barna.com/research/what-millennials-want-when-they-visit-church/>.

10. "What Millennials Want When They Visit Church."

The devotional will have both a print and eBook version. Some new moms may prefer to have a hard copy and others may find it easier to read on their phones or kindles. The eBooks will be free for everyone. The hard copies of the devotional will be given to new moms who visit or attend LFC when they have a child. The hardcopy books will also be available for people to buy to give to their friends outside of the church when they have a child.

Hypothesis

For Millennials to return to church, they need to see church as essential to their lives. They need to believe that the church has a direct impact on their daily life and that it is worth their time.¹¹ I believe that this devotional will help Millennial moms feel support from the local church. It will improve their perception of Christians. I believe that they will feel more connected to women inside the church. This will give them a greater desire to go to church.

I also believe that in reading the devotional, women will connect with God. It will allow them a small moment during the chaos of raising a baby to pause and reflect on God. For some women this would not have happened otherwise.

Lastly, I believe that this devotional will be a way for Millennials to share their faith with other Millennials. This generation saw many of their parents attend church and say that faith was important in their lives, but not live that faith out beyond the walls of the church.¹² If faith

11. Thom. S. Rainer and Sam S. Rainer III, *Essential Church: Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), location 203, Kindle.

12. Rainer, *Essential Church*, location 1713, Kindle.

is worth their time, it is worth sharing with their friends. Millennials want a faith that they can take seriously and share with their loved ones.¹³

When women have this devotional as a tool to give to their friends, they will have a nonintimidating way to share their faith. This will be a great way for them to feel like they are sharing Christ and it will inspire them to be more involved with the church.

13. Rainer, *Essential Church*, location 203, Kindle.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter will show why the time of conception, pregnancy, and birth is important in the family and to God. It will explore the Biblical and theological implications of why this life phase is unique and special. It will look at the responsibility that comes with parenting and training children in their faith from an early age and the accountability that the church has in raising Godly families. Finally, it will provide a Biblical way to draw in young mothers who are outside the church.

The Mandate to Have Children

From the very beginning of man's time on earth, having children has been important to both God and man. The first commandment God gave to the first man and woman was "Be fruitful and increase in number" (Gen 1:28 NIV).¹

The moment that sin entered the world, it had a tremendous impact on humanity, including how children would enter the world. The first punishment given to Eve was, "I will sharpen the pain of your pregnancy, and in pain you will give birth" (Gen 3:16).² The first commandment given to man and woman is now going to be difficult because of the fall. In *The City of God*, Augustine writes, "The nuptial blessing, however, whereby the pair, joined in

1. All Scripture citations are taken from the New International Version, 2011, unless otherwise noted.

2. Genesis 3:16 New Living Translation, 2016.

marriage, were to increase and multiply and fill the earth, remained in force even when they sinned. Yet it was given before they sinned, for its purpose was to make it clear that the procreation of children is a part of the glory of marriage and not of the punishment of sin.”³ Though the fall may come after the mandate to increase in number, it does not make it null.

Recently couples have been waiting longer and longer to get married and settle down, and thus women are getting older and older when they have children. The average age for a woman for her first birth is now over 25 years old and since 1990 the birthrate for women ages 35 to 39 has increased by 63 percent.⁴ Many couples even opt to not have children. Some do not want to change the schedule of their lives or risk their careers. Some believe the world is already too full of people and they don’t want to add to overpopulation.

In *The Genesis of Sex*, O. Palmer Robertson lays out the argument that some women give about their right to birth control and to choose to remain childless. These women believe that if the man can relieve himself of his punishment of the fall by laboring, then a woman should be able to relieve herself of her original sin by lessening the number of children she has. Robertson comes back at this argument by stressing the promise of God’s redemptive covenant. He believes that Christian couples should have children even though it may disrupt their current lives because “an integral aspect of God’s redemptive covenant is directed to the divine promise that stretches across the generations. God’s plan for the ages includes the

3. Augustine, “The Nuptial Blessing Remained After Sin Appeared.” in *Ancient Christian Commentary On Scripture: Old Testament I Genesis 1-11*, ed. Andrew Louth, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 39.

4. Jean M. Twenge, *iGen: Why Today’s Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy – and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood*, (New York: Atria Books), 2017, 224-225.

peculiar blessings that come only through experiencing the joys of seeing His grace extend to children's children."⁵

St. John of Damascus is quoted as saying, "Marriage is devised in order that the human race might be preserved by the generation of children."⁶ God's intention was for the earth to fill with humans who were created in His image. This would come about through procreation in the confines of marriage.

Author Marva J. Dawn, in *Is It a Lost Cause?*, gives her view on the necessity of having children. She sees that there has been a paradigm shift recently where children are seen more as an optional commodity. She believes that there are bad reasons for parents to choose to remain childless but that there can also be very legitimate reasons such as health problems or ministry restraints.⁷ If at all possible, Christian couples should choose to have children either through birth, adoption, or spiritual adoption.

The first humans who were commanded to be fruitful and multiply, Adam and Eve, did procreate and have children and their children had children. The earth, however, continued to be full of hurt and destruction after humans were forced out of the garden. Eventually it got so bad that God decided to wipe out most of the world's population and start over. As Noah and his family were about to enter the world fresh and new, God gave them a command that almost echoed that of Eden 1,000 years before. "Then God blessed Noah and his sons and told

5. O. Palmer Robertson, *The Genesis of Sex: Sexual Relationships In the First Book of the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company), 2002, 69-70.

6. John of Damascus, "The Punishment of Adam and Eve" in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament I Genesis 1-11*, ed. Andrew Louth (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 92.

7. Marva Dawn, *Is It a Lost Cause? Having the Heart of God for the Church's Children* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 1997, 108-109.

them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth’” (Genesis 9:1).⁸ God continued and continues to want the human race to grow through conception, pregnancy, and childbirth.

God Intimately Involved in Conception and in the Womb

God treasures all of His creation. He especially treasures humans. There are specific times in peoples’ lives where God draws closer to them or makes His presence more known. Biblically, it appears pregnancy is an important time to God. There are many examples in the Bible of when God or an angel ministered or spoke to someone in regard to having children.

In the Gospels there are nine agreed upon occurrences where angels appear: to Zacharias, to Joseph three times, to Mary mother of Jesus, to the shepherds, to Jesus a couple times, and to the women after Jesus rose from the dead. Of these occurrences, almost half of them occur with moments of childbirth.

Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth were old and believed that they were past the age of conceiving children. Elizabeth could have become pregnant and discovered this pregnancy like other couples discover they are pregnant. But God decided that this was special enough to warrant sending an angel to deliver the message. The pregnancy announcement for John the Baptist was a big deal. (Luke 1:11-20)

Joseph was engaged to Mary and there was no human way possible for him to have a child in her womb. And yet an angel appeared to tell him that Mary was pregnant, that it was of the Holy Spirit, and that he should continue to marry her. (Matthew 1:20-24) An angel also

8. Genesis 9:1 New Living Translation, 2016.

appeared to Mary to let her know that she would conceive and bear a son who would be the Son of God (Luke 1:26-38).

Not only did God take an interest in pregnancy and early motherhood in the New Testament, but there are numerous examples in the Old Testament as well. From the beginning of the nation of Israel, many in the first few generations had trouble conceiving and God heard them and answered their prayers. There is not a shortage of people in the Old Testament who had issues with conception and pregnancy. This is seen from Father Abraham all the way down to women who were being picked on and made fun of for their lack of children. God saw them and spoke to them about their pregnancy.

Abraham, the Father of Israel, and his wife Sarah were old with no children. The Lord appeared to them personally to let them know that when He would come back to visit one year later, they would have a son. This was so hard for Sarah to believe that she laughed out loud and later the son was named Isaac, which means laughter (Genesis 18:1-15).

Isaac himself had trouble with conceiving like his Father had before him. "Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was childless. The Lord answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant" (Gen 25:21). While she was pregnant, she felt a lot of jostling and movement, so she asked God about it. He answered her in her pregnant state and let her know that she had twins inside of her who would be two different nations (Genesis 25:22-24).

Isaac's son, Jacob, also continued the family tradition of issues with conception. He had two wives. His first wife, Leah, had no problem giving him sons for years. When she stopped conceiving, however, she became desperate and, "God listened to Leah" (Gen 30:17) and she

bore Jacob a fifth son. Jacob's favorite wife Rachel could not bear him a son. It was not until "God remembered Rachel; He listened to her and enabled her to conceive," (Gen 30:22) that she was able to give Jacob a son. When this happened, Rachel rejoiced that God had taken away her disgrace. To be barren was a hard thing, both personally, and as part of their cultural role as women. God's hand was all over the make-up and timing of the conception and children in this large family.

Hundreds of years later, after the family of Abraham had become slaves in Egypt, after they had been rescued by God, wandered the desert for 40 years, entered the promised land, and had times of worshipping God mixed in with times of rejecting God for idols, an angel of the Lord spoke to another woman who was barren. He told her that even though she was childless and barren, she would conceive and give birth to a son. He also had special instructions for this child to be a Nazarite, dedicated to God from the womb. The woman was to have a very strict diet while she was pregnant. She was told this child would deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines (Judges 13).

Around this time, there was another woman named Hannah. One of the first things written about her is that, while her husband's other wife had children, she had none. Every year when their family went to Shiloh to worship, her husband Elkanah would give Hannah extra portions of meat because he loved her and "the Lord had closed her womb" (1 Samuel 1:5). Elkanah's other wife would provoke her and make fun of her constantly and it was very difficult for Hannah. During one of these trips she was praying to the Lord bitterly and begging him for a son. The Lord "remembered her" and she conceived and gave birth to a son who she dedicated to God (1 Samuel 1).

Not only is God present with parents who are pregnant, He is also very present and involved with the baby. There are numerous passages in the Bible, by various authors, who tell how God was a part of their formation in the womb.

King David wrote about this in the 139th Psalm,

For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.
My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be" (Psalm 139:13-16).

In his commentary on the Psalms, C. Hassell Bullock compares this psalm with the description of how humans were created in the creation story in the beginning of Genesis. In the Hebrew language, verse 13 literally means, "For you formed my kidneys." The kidney was thought to be the seat of emotions, but it can also represent the internal organs. Ultimately, King David wanted his readers to know that God is involved in prenatal development.⁹

David believed that God knit him together in his mother's womb and that God saw what He was doing while he was being put together. This is a picture of a God who cares about babies as they are first conceived and then as they are growing during pregnancy.

When Jeremiah was called to be a prophet, the first thing God said to him was,

9. C. Hassell Bullock, *Psalms Volume 2: Psalms 73-150*. Teach the Text Commentary Series, ed. Mark I. Strauss and John H. Walton (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017), 507.

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
before you were born I set you apart;
I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” (Jeremiah 1:5)

Before Jeremiah was out of the womb, God had a plan for his life. While he was in the womb, God was forming him and setting him apart. God is present in the choosing of life and in the direction that life goes. He is present in the forming of the life as it mysteriously happens in the womb. King Solomon wrote, “As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother’s womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things” (Ecclesiastes 11:5).

From the moment God called out His special people and set them apart, He was intimately involved in their procreation. He opened and closed wombs. He heard cries of women who wanted desperately to be mothers. At various times He sent angels to announce or give counsel to those who were expecting a child. The time of conception and pregnancy is very important to God and it is something He takes seriously.

Importance of Early Childhood

Not only is conception and pregnancy important to God, God is also concerned about early childhood. This is a pivotal time for faith development for the child and the mother.

The Jewish people believed children to be special. Parents had close bonds with their children, which is made evident in the many different names they had for specific developmental times. The traditional words “ben” and “bath” are for “son” and “daughter,” but in addition, there are at least nine different terms for nine specific, special life phases. The

youngest term for a new infant is “jelled” for a girl and “jadalah” for a boy and is used in Isaiah 9:6. It is also used in Isaiah 29:23 where God is telling Israel that when they see their infant babies, they will see the awesomeness of God. The term “jonek” literally means “a suckling,” and would be for a baby who is exclusively nursing. This word appears in Psalm 8:2 with a beautiful example of young children already praising God. The third word for babe, “olel,” is considered a time when the baby is still nursing but is also eating solid food. When the child becomes weaned, he is considered a “gamul.” This weaning usually happened at the end of two or three years. As the child continued to grow, the fifth phase is “taph.” The sixth phase is “elem” for males and “almah” for females. Both of these Hebrew words have the connotation of becoming firm and strong. When children become youth, they are called “naari” which literally means “to shake himself free.” The last phase for childhood is “bachur” which is considered the “ripened one.” After studying Jewish culture, Alfred Edersheim believed, “assuredly, those who so keenly watched child-life as to give a pictorial designation to each advancing stage of its existence, must have been fondly attached to their children.”¹⁰

Having a child was special and important in the time of the New Testament, but it was also dangerous and scary. It was hard for both the mother and the child. About 30-35 percent of all newborns did not live past a few months. Fifty percent of children died by the time they were ten years old. There are estimates of 17 maternal deaths out of a thousand births. If a

10. Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life In the Days Of Christ* (James Pott & Co, 1876), 71-72.

woman was able to live be in her fifties, she probably gave birth to six children and if she was lucky, half of them would live to adulthood.¹¹

Biblical and historical documentation shows that children were cherished in Biblical times. Jesus is even quoted as telling His disciples that they must become like little children (Matthew 19:14). God's desire is for people to know Him from birth and continue to grow in Him as a child, as a teenager, and as an adult. It is possible for adults to come to Christ later in life, but this is not ideal and even more difficult.

In 2004 the Barna research group conducted a nationwide study of over 2,600 adults to investigate when people are accepting Christ and the situations surrounding that acceptance. They found that nearly half of those interviewed accepted Christ before they were a teenager (43 percent). Of those children who accepted Christ at an early age, half of them accepted Jesus because of their parents. When it comes to keeping that faith, the study showed that those who become a Christian before they were 13 were those most likely to remain "absolutely committed" to Jesus later on in their life. The leader of the Barna Group, George Barna, commented on what he considered the most significant outcome of the research, "Families, churches and parachurch ministries must recognize that primary window of opportunity for effectively reaching people with the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection is during the pre-teen years. It is during those years that people develop their frames of reference for the remainder of their life – especially theologically and morally. Consistently

11. Lee Martin McDonald and Joel B. Green, *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 184, accessed April 4, 2018, EBSCO Host.

explaining and modeling truth principles for young people is the most critical factor in their spiritual development.”¹²

The National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) conducted surveys and interviews in the early 2000’s in hopes of understanding the religious and spiritual lives of American youth. What they found was that the “single most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents.”¹³ Children are picking up the faith of their parents from an early age. When it comes to faith, most often parents “will get what they are.”¹⁴

Influential Christian Writings on the Importance of Parenting

Both the Barna study and the NSYR study showed the correlation between beginning early in passing on faith to children, and children having a real faith later in their lives. The idea to start early in teaching children about God is also found in the Bible and the writings of many of the most influential Christian Fathers, theologians, and contemporary authors.

Psalms 78:3-6 says,

Things we have heard and known,
things our ancestors have told us.
We will not hide them from their descendants;
we will tell the next generation
the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD,
his power, and the wonders he has done.
He decreed statutes for Jacob

12 .Barna Research Group, “Evangelism is Most Effective Among Kids,” *The Barna Blog*, October 11, 2004, accessed March 1, 2018, <https://www.barna.com/research/evangelism-is-most-effective-among-kids/>.

13. Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 261.

14. Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 261.

and established the law in Israel,
which he commanded our ancestors
to teach their children,
so the next generation would know them,
even the children yet to be born,
and they in turn would tell their children.

When John Calvin read this Psalm, he commented this “passing on of knowledge” should even be for little babes. Giving children the Word of God should start at an early age and should continue to be passed down and taught to each generation.¹⁵

Psalm 127:3-5 is a beautiful picture of the blessing and responsibility of children to their parents.

Children are a heritage from the LORD,
offspring a reward from him.
Like arrows in the hands of a warrior
are children born in one’s youth.
Blessed is the man
whose quiver is full of them.

While Psalm 127:3-5 is often cited to show the blessings that come with having children, Paul and Billie Kaye Tsika believe this is a good analogy to how many people actually parent as well. They write about an analogy in *Parenting with Purpose* where they show how parents launch their children out into their future and hope and pray that they make it to a perfect bull’s-eye that they have imagined for them. Some parents are very careful in how they set up their arrows and they know exactly where they are aiming. Other parents are wobbly in the vision they have and in which way they want to send their children. In archery, and with children, arrows need to be pointed in a direction with purpose or they will not go where they

15. Barbara Pitkin, “‘The Heritage of the Lord’: Children in the Theology of John Calvin,” in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia Bunge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 171.

need to go. The archer releasing the arrow has a huge influence on where that arrow is going to land. In the same way, the parent needs to be strong and understanding of the bull's-eye to give their child a chance at landing in their faith from an early age.¹⁶

In all of his research on successful parenting, George Barna came to a similar conclusion. He believes parents must see themselves as coaches. The only way a coach can “win” is for the coach to understand the definition of a win. Coaches must have a vision for where it is that they want the team to go. In parenting it is no different. There must be specific outcomes that parents are working towards.¹⁷ Again, it is best if parents have this mentality and this vision while their children are still young.

When John Calvin reflected on Psalm 127, he noted that children really are a gift from God. He also pointed out that the “majority of children are not always a source of joy to their parents.”¹⁸ The reason people parent isn't because it is easy but because children are a gift from God. Realizing that they are from God should encourage parents as they are taking care of their children. Calvin believed that “the children we ought to wish for are not such as many violently oppress the wretched and the suffering, or overreach others by craft and deceit, or accumulate great riches by unlawful means, but such as will practice uprightness, and be willing to live in obedience to the laws, and prepared to render an account of their life.”¹⁹ By looking

16. Paul Tsika and Billie Kaye Tsika, *Parenting with Purpose: Winning the Heart of Your Child* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 2014), 22-23.

17. George Barna, *Revolutionary Parenting: What the Research Shows Really Works* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2007), 16-17.

18. Pitkin, “The Heritage of the Lord,” 170-171.

19. Pitkin, “The Heritage of the Lord,” 170-171.

at what the parent wants the child to be like as an adult, a parent can see what the goal of parenting is as well. Parents are to teach godliness. They are to show their children what they have themselves learned from the Lord.

Martin Luther believed that bringing up a child in the way of the Lord is of the utmost importance.

But the greatest good in married life, that which makes all suffering and labor worthwhile, is that God grants offspring and commands that they be brought up to worship and serve him. In all the world this is the noblest and most precious work, because to God there can be nothing dearer than the salvation of souls...Most certainly father and mother are apostles, bishops, and priests to their children, for it is they who make them acquainted with the gospel. In short, there is no greater or nobler authority on earth than that of parents over their children, for this authority is both spiritual and temporal.²⁰

He goes on to say that some people will look down on the daily grind of parenting, even giving the example of changing a dirty diaper. But this is a job that cannot be ignored. These parents are “apostles and bishops” charged with passing on the faith to their children.²¹

C.S. Lewis also believed that what happens with the parent, particularly the mother, in the home is important. In a letter he wrote,

I think I can understand that feeling about a housewife’s work being like that of Sisyphus. But it is surely in reality the most important work in the world. What do ships, railways, miners, cars, government etc. exist for except that people may be fed, warmed, and safe in their own homes? As Dr. Johnson said, “To be happy at home is the end of all human endeavor.” (1st to be happy to prepare for being happy in our own real home hereafter; 2nd in the meantime to be happy in our houses.) We wage war in order to have peace, we work in order to have leisure, we produce food in order to eat it. So your job is the one for which all others exist.²²

20. Jane E. Strohl, “The Child in Luther’s Theology: ‘For What Purpose Do We Older Folks Exist, Other Than to Care for . . . the Young?’” in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia Bunge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 140.

21. Strohl, “The Child in Luther’s Theology,” 140-41.

22. W. H. Lewis, ed., *Letters of C. S. Lewis* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966), 262.

There are many important callings that people have on their lives, but C.S. Lewis believed that what happens in the home is the most important.

Proverbs 22:6 is often used when speaking of parenting. “Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.” In Rabbinic Hebrew, parents are specifically told to “hanak,” which means “instruct, train.”²³ According to a commentary on Proverbs by Ernst C. Lucas, the first part of the verse is literally “dedicate a child according to his way.” Unfortunately, Proverbs are not guarantees of what will happen. They are possibilities of what could be if nothing causes a disruption. It would be wonderful if parents could simply start at infancy with instructing their children and their children would never depart from their faith, but that is not always the case.²⁴

This Proverb is, however, an expectation that parents should be purposefully training their children from a very young age.²⁵ Training children is a life-long process. There are rarely huge, life changing moments but parents are to be there for the small moments that link together from an early age in a continuous training.²⁶

In their chapter on why early training is essential, Paul and Billie Kaye Tsika write, “We must remember that we are *training up* our children, not just raising them. *Raising* means providing food and sustenance – it is maintaining life and fostering physical growth. That is an

23. Ernst C. Lucas, *The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary: Proverbs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2015), 149.

24. Lucas, *Proverbs*, 149.

25. Lucas, *Proverbs*, 149.

26. Paul David Tripp, *Parenting: The 14 Gospel Principles That Can Radically Change Your Family* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 91.

important thing to do, but it is not everything. We also have to *train* our children. What is *training*? *Training* is a conscious, active effort to instruct, discipline, and model. Training is not a by-product of a good environment, a loving home, and great schools. Training does not happen by osmosis. No wild horse was ever tamed by being grouped together with trained horses. Though children are very different from wild horses (most of the time), no more can we expect our children to be trained simply by putting them in a good place with others who are well behaved.”²⁷ From an early age, parents must be intentional in training their children about faith and not simply raising children.

Like a young sapling tree, parents are called to mold their children while they are young. When a tree is young, it is flexible and able to bend and change with a little pressure. When the tree is older, the tree snaps when pressure is applied. Children must also be shaped to grow in specific directions while they are young and impressionable.²⁸

Perhaps the most used passage about the importance of parenting a child from an early age, is Deuteronomy 6:5-9.

Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates (Deuteronomy 6:5-9).

In *Revolutionary Parenting*, George Barna points out that this passage in Deuteronomy makes it clear God places great importance on parents instructing their children. He concludes

27. Tsika, *Parenting with Purpose*; 71.

28. Tsika, *Parenting with Purpose*; 72-73.

it is not the responsibility of schools, government, friends, or even churches but it is with parents.²⁹ He also points out it must be a priority from *day one*.³⁰ In his research on faith, he found those adults who continued in their faith as they grew up, had parents who were intentional about their own faith and about working daily towards passing that on to their children.³¹

In this Deuteronomy passage, Moses used a Hebrew literary technique of putting his examples into groups of four. This technique was used to stress universality. Faith should be woven into *all* aspects of family life. Parents are to talk about God everywhere and in everything that they do. Everything can be used as an example if parents are being proactive.³²

Deuteronomy 6 is an example of the important work parents have in creating *God-consciousness* and *God-submission* in their children. Parents are a tool in the hands of God to talk with their children at a young age and throughout their lives about how the world around them shows the existence of a loving God.³³

Not only are parents called to talk about God and weave God into all aspects of life, parents are also called to raise their children from a young age to be disciples. The Great Commission in Matthew 28 is a call for all Christians, but it is also a picture of what parents are

29. Barna, *Revolutionary Parenting*, 25.

30. Barna, *Revolutionary Parenting*, 29.

31. Barna, *Revolutionary Parenting*, 34.

32. Dawn, *Is It a Lost Cause?*, 113.

33. Tripp, *Parenting*, 30-32.

to do for their children. As daunting of a job as this is, however, God also promises He will be with parents through all of this.³⁴

Importance of the Church in Raising Children

God wanted His creation to be fruitful and multiply. Parents are commanded to instruct their children from an early age. But all of the responsibility does not fall on the parent. They are not an island to themselves.

A very important part of the responsibility of the church is to help the nuclear family as they keep the command of raising their child in the faith. In his book *Family at the Crossroads*, Rodney Clapp makes the argument for how imperative it is for the church to come alongside families in their childrearing. He states that “the nuclear family is not God’s most important earthly institution. It is not the social agent that most significantly shapes and forms the character of Christians.”³⁵ Clapp believes that the church must take responsibility for the faith of children.

Marva J. Dawn echoes this as well. She believes that every member of the body must understand that it is part of their responsibility to help raise children in the faith. Parenting is not something that parents must do alone, but it rests on the entire Christian community.³⁶

As hard as they might try not to be, families are caught up in the current culture. It is the world in which they live. All children were born into a hard world full of sin, but it feels like

34. Tripp, *Parenting*, 183-184.

35. Rodney Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads: Beyond Traditional & Modern Options* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 84.

36. Dawn, *Is It a Lost Cause?*, 57-58.

in the current 21st century, parents are even more aware of how hard and unsafe the world is for their children. Clapp uses an analogy to show how needed the church is. “On the wild whitewater of post-modernity, the church is kind of an ark – providing a place to stand, companionship with others of like mind and imagination, and a rudder to guide in a society that has otherwise lost direction.”³⁷

Children need their parents to train them in the way to go. Parents need the church to gather around them and show them the best ways to do this training. God designed parents to teach their children, but He also envisioned their faith community to come around them as well.

Beginning with Abraham, God chose to mark who was a part of His covenant with circumcision. This act of circumcision was performed when a male child was only eight days old.

Then God said to Abraham, “As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring. Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant” (Genesis 17:9-14).

The act of circumcision was a symbolic way of becoming part of the family of God. It was a way for the community to know and to celebrate that the child was now a child of the

37. Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads*, 85.

covenant and a child of God. It was very important to those parents who took their faith seriously.

Because parents had their children circumcised at such a young age, the reminder would be there from the beginning; this child belongs to God. A week after the child is brought into the world, he is already being brought into the faith community. He doesn't just belong to his mom and dad. He belongs to God. The whole community has an obligation to help raise this child.

Like good Jews, Mary and Joseph had Jesus circumcised on the eighth day. They also brought Him to the temple to be dedicated to the Lord. This is recounted in Luke 2.

When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons" (Luke 2:22-24).

There is nowhere in the Old Testament that would require Mary and Joseph to bring their son to the temple to present Him to the Lord. In his commentary on Luke, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J. gives his view on what Mary and Joseph were doing with this dedication. He believes that this presentation may have been an imitation of the child Samuel in 1 Samuel 1:22-24. He believes it could also have been Luke's way of showing his gentile audience what was happening in the early birth practices of Palestinian Jews.³⁸ Perhaps it wasn't required for the child to be presented in the temple, but it could have been something that was happening in New Testament times.

38. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *The Gospel According to Luke (I-IX)*. The Anchor Bible Volume 28, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (New York City: Doubleday & Company, 1981), 421.

It was required, however, for the new mothers to go to the priest. Mary and Joseph followed the law that Moses gave in Leviticus 12. There were different laws of purification depending on whether the mother gave birth to a son or a daughter.

The LORD said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites: 'A woman who becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son will be ceremonially unclean for seven days, just as she is unclean during her monthly period. On the eighth day the boy is to be circumcised. Then the woman must wait thirty-three days to be purified from her bleeding. She must not touch anything sacred or go to the sanctuary until the days of her purification are over. If she gives birth to a daughter, for two weeks the woman will be unclean, as during her period. Then she must wait sixty-six days to be purified from her bleeding.

When the days of her purification for a son or daughter are over, she is to bring to the priest at the entrance to the tent of meeting a year-old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a dove for a sin offering. He shall offer them before the LORD to make atonement for her, and then she will be ceremonially clean from her flow of blood.

These are the regulations for the woman who gives birth to a boy or a girl. But if she cannot afford a lamb, she is to bring two doves or two young pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering. In this way the priest will make atonement for her, and she will be clean'" (Leviticus 12:1-8).

The woman is given a period of time with her newborn for her body to heal and then she is to go see the priest. Through circumcision she has been reminded that her child belongs to God and that she has a community to help her raise her child. Now she is also reminded that *she* belongs to God and *she* is also a part of this faith community. She is not left out on her own. She needs the priest during this important time in her life.

Within a few months after her child is born, the mother must go to the temple and see the priest. She must *enter* the temple. She must *see* a priest. In the 21st century, it is easy for moms to get caught up in the day to day routine and craziness that comes with a newborn baby. Making it to church does not always become a priority. But for the Jews, there was a small time to experience life with a newborn, and then almost immediately they were expected

to be in the temple. Perhaps it would be a good thing if mothers now were immediately reminded of who their child belongs to and given a reason to come to church. It would be good if they could see the church as an ark helping to guide them and support them as they ride out the waves of post-modern culture while they try to train their child from infancy.

In This Pivotal and Impactful Time, New Moms Need Community and Support

Having a child is a beautiful blessing, and it ushers in a season of change. Not all of the changes that occur are positive. During this new season, women need support.

The Bible backs up this need for support. When Adam was alone in the garden, God said that it was not good for man to be alone, and he gave him a helper (Gen 2:18). When Moses asked for help, God gave him Aaron (Exodus 4). Jesus sent out the disciples in pairs (Mark 6:7). The author of Hebrews writes, “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:24-25).

In the book of Romans, Paul writes, “Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn” (Romans 12:15). Pregnancy, birth, and starting a family are usually times in a woman’s life when she is experiencing many moments of both rejoicing and mourning.

Many studies have been done recently on how having children affects the lives of parents. The results are varied. Most find, however, that having children brings down happiness levels in parents. There is now the term “Parenting happiness gap” which involved research with 22 countries and showed that in the US, those with children are much less happy than those

without children. The leading researcher on the project, Jane Glass, believes that it's not that parents are really unhappy. She thinks that parents are finding purpose and fulfillment but that they are so stressed out, "which can overshadow any happiness to be gained from shepherding another human being through life."³⁹

Time magazine researched if parents really are less happy. They discovered that there are some who are happier, some who show the same happiness level as their childless peers, and some who are less happy. They found that there are many factors which dictate parental happiness including age, type of parent, and temperament of child. Parents with small children reported being the unhappiest.⁴⁰

It is believed that approximately 10 percent to 13 percent of women experience prenatal depression and that there are many more who experience depressive symptoms but don't report them.⁴¹ Concerned about this statistic, Amy Wenzel surveyed approximately 150 new mothers about their stress and worry. She found that *pregnancy* can also be a very stressful time in the life of a woman with 20 percent to 50 percent of women reporting that they worried a moderate amount.⁴² Wenzel looked at the data reported by others as well. In 2002, Hanna-Leena Melender questioned 329 pregnant women and found that 78 percent had fears of pregnancy, childbirth, or both. Also in 2002, Geissbuehler and Eberhard found that

39. Solana Pyne and Michael Tabb, "Why Parents Are Less Happy," *Quartz*, June 16, 2016, accessed March 27, 2018, <https://qz.com/708438/the-parenting-happiness-gap-is-real-new-research-confirms/>.

40. Sonja Lyubomirsky, "Do Children Bring Happiness – Or Misery?," *Time*, August 1, 2013, accessed March 27, 2018, <http://ideas.time.com/2013/08/01/do-children-bring-happiness-or-misery/>.

41. Amy Wenzel, *Anxiety in Childbearing Women: Diagnosis and Treatment*, (Washington DC: American Psychological Association, 2011), 7.

42. Wenzel, *Anxiety in Childbearing*, 4.

57.7 percent reported “some fear” and 5.3 percent reported “intense fear” which interfered with their daily functioning.⁴³

Women need support during this emotional, stressful, very special time of life. In *Bowling Alone*, Robert D. Putnam makes the argument that having social capital can actually help people cope better than medicinal drugs. He writes “‘Call me [or indeed almost anyone] in the morning’ might actually be better medical advice than ‘Take two aspirin’ as a cure for what ails us.”⁴⁴ God designed us to be in relationships. This is especially true during hard times, joyful times, and life-changing times.

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon writes on the importance of having people in our lives.

Two are better than one,
because they have a good return for their labor:
If either of them falls down,
one can help the other up.
But pity anyone who falls
and has no one to help them up (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10).

There will be many times during a mother’s pregnancy and early childhood with her new baby when she will “fall down” and need someone there to help her up.

Some of this community and support should come in the form of older women who have already been through the pains of pregnancy, childbirth, and raising young children. Titus 2:3-5 urges the older women in the church to be looking out for and instructing the younger women,

In the same way, teach older women to be holy in their behavior, not speaking against others or enslaved to too much wine, but teaching what is good. Then they can teach

43. Wenzel, *Anxiety in Childbearing*, 106.

44. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 289.

the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be wise and pure, to be good workers at home, to be kind, and to yield to their husbands. Then no one will be able to criticize the teaching God gave us (Titus 2:3-5).

In her book, *The Way Home: Beyond Feminism, Back to Reality*, Mary Pride writes about how older women are actually the experts on mothering and that they should be looked to more than someone with a Ph.D.⁴⁵ There must be a way for younger women to have community with older women in a way where they can learn from them about what it means to be a Christian mother.

It is also important for pregnant women and new moms to spend time with other women who are going through this similar life stage. In *Counseling Women*, Dr. Tim Clinton and Dr. Diane Langberg write, “While prenatal appointments with your doctor will keep tabs on your physical health, you need to keep tabs on your emotional health as well. There’s no substitute for spending time with other pregnant women – laughing, crying, talking, sharing stories and concerns, praying for each other, and enjoying this time of your life as a gift from God.”⁴⁶ They recommend joining a support group in the local community or church.⁴⁷

When Mary found out she was pregnant with Jesus, one of the first pieces of information the Angel gave her was that her cousin Elizabeth was also pregnant. Mary immediately left her home and went to stay with her pregnant cousin for three months (Luke

45. Mary Pride, *The Way Home: Beyond Feminism, Back to Reality*, (Westchester, IL: Good News Publishers, 1985), 111.

46. Tim Clinton and Diane Langberg, *The Quick-Reference Guide to Counseling Women: 40 Topics, Spiritual Insights & Easy-to-Use Action Steps*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2011), 219.

47. Clinton, *Guide to Counseling Women*, 219.

1). God was helping Mary and Elizabeth have community with each other during their pregnancies.

When author Andy Stanley researched what has helped people's faith grow, he boiled it down to five catalysts. One of the most important catalysts that they found in almost every single faith story was "providential relationship." Stanley comments that he's never heard a faith story without a relational component.⁴⁸ In their church, they do not do premarital counseling. Instead, engaged couples are paired with married couples who meet together eight times to go through marriage lessons. They become mentors for the newer couple and are there for them in the future when they face marital issues.⁴⁹ Perhaps this is something that churches need to be doing with new parents as well. This could be a great place for relationships to form for support from parents who have been through the battlefield of parenting.

Andy Stanley found that another catalyst of faith in people is "pivotal circumstances." These could also be called "defining moments." His list includes "having a baby" as one of these circumstances.⁵⁰ Stanley's church understood that the hardest part of using these moments as ways of growing faith, is the fact that many times people don't see the pivotal moments coming.⁵¹ With having a baby, however, there is the time of pregnancy to prepare a little bit for the life-changing moment. Stanley found, "It wasn't really the event itself that grew

48. Andy Stanley, *Deep and Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched and Churched People Love to Attend* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 131-132.

49. Stanley, *Deep and Wide*, 136.

50. Stanley, *Deep and Wide*, 137.

51. Stanley, *Deep and Wide*, 138.

or eroded our faith; it was our *interpretation* of the event that determined which way we went. The conclusions we draw about God in the midst of our pivotal circumstances drive us toward or away from him.”⁵² He also found that what determines how we interpret events and circumstances is based on two things; our worldviews, and who we are doing life with at the time.⁵³ When these women are experiencing the pivotal life moment of pregnancy, childbirth, and taking care of an infant, they need other women around them who can help them make sense of their new world. They need women who have been there before. They need women who can walk through these moments with them and help them to see the big picture. This is a huge life moment. Studies and the Bible show how important this time is and how desperately community is needed.

Leveraging This Season

As women are living in this pivotal life season, the church has a window of opportunity to show themselves as a viable, possibly even essential, aspect to a woman’s calling as a mother. The church may want to use the example of Paul in Acts 17 as he reached out to the people in Athens.

The people of Athens were similar to many of the women living in post-modern America today; both being spiritually and morally eclectic. But as Paul entered into that world, he was able to speak into it. In his book, *You Found Me*, Rick Richardson sets up how Paul does this through a four-part strategy.

52. Stanley, *Deep and Wide*, 138.

53. Stanley, *Deep and Wide*, 140-141.

First, Paul uses their own language and methods of communication to affirm their culture and connect with them. He used their rhetoric and examples that were understandable and relatable. This is a key step to building trust. Repeatedly in their studies, Richardson found trust was the first step that needed to be established for people to begin a journey to finding Jesus. Trust can grow quickly in an environment of common interests.⁵⁴

In their own worlds, new moms are reminded almost constantly that they are now living the life of a mother. They need communication and examples that can relate to them in that way. They also need to be affirmed as a mother. They need to know that the sacrifices that they are making are noticed and that they are important. They need to be affirmed that life with an infant is a beautiful thing but it is also a very tiring and thankless job. They need to be affirmed in their role as a mom.

Richardson says that the second step that Paul employs in Athens is to discern and affirm their spiritual interest and search. What is it that these moms believe and why? Are there any parts of their beliefs that can be affirmed? This generation is looking for people who will “listen without judgement” and who “do not force the conversation into a conclusion.” After sharing stories of being mothers, the conversation can naturally move to conversations about God.

It can be hard to share with Americans that they are not the center of the universe and just because someone believes something, it does not mean that it is true. People cannot simply create their own religion and expect it to be true. But this is what most of post-modern

54. Rick Richardson, *You Found Me: New Research on How Unchurched, Nones, Millennials, and Irreligious Are Surprisingly Open to Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2019), 128.

new moms will believe. Much like the people of Athens, they believe that they can choose their own morality and piece together parts of various religions to create what feels best for them. There is hope, however. Richardson found a time people are most receptive to hearing they need to change their beliefs, and the time they will be most receptive to hearing another person's opinion on these spiritual matters, is when they are in a time of crisis and dissonance. During those seasons of life where their paradigm of life is shifting, they are more open to changing their own beliefs about what should be at the center of their lives and what will ultimately satisfy them.⁵⁵

Third, Paul challenges their misguided way of fulfilling their search and satisfying the hunger of their souls. This is a hard step. These moms must be shown that what they have created as a religion or as a god is not actually God. They must be shown that what they are basing their lives and their reality on is not true. They must be shown there is a better way. In Athens, Paul challenged the idols of wood and stone. What are the idols mothers create that they put in front of God? They must gently be told these are false idols. This is best done through personal stories of times where individuals trusted in false gods.⁵⁶ The god of success, the god of consumerism, the god of comfort, the god of happiness, and especially the god of motherhood could all be great places to continue on with the conversation.

Finally, Paul shows the Athenians evidence supporting his message and points to the true way to fulfill what it is they are searching for. He shows them all the searching and aching

55. Richardson, *You Found Me*, 130.

56. Richardson, *You Found Me*, 131.

is actually fulfilled in Jesus.⁵⁷ These moms need to know that the god of success and the god of being a perfect mom will never completely satisfy. They need women to come alongside them, build trust, and through personal story show them the life of a mom who has found their satisfaction in Jesus.

The time of pregnancy and early motherhood is a great opportunity for the church to step up and reach out to young moms who are outside the church. These women must be affirmed in their role as a mother and through these conversations, doors could be opened to help them enter into Christian community and find who God really is.

Maternal Images

A focus of the project, Reaching Millennial Moms, was to find ways for women in the church to connect with each other over the shared bond of motherhood. A small note must be made, as well, on the shared imagery that moms will have with the church, with God, and with Mary as mother. Not only could this be a way to bridge relationships between women themselves, but it could be a way for women to feel a connection with the institution of the church.

One concept that must be addressed is that the Virgin Mary was the mother of Jesus. Her motherhood holds huge importance. As Charles Cardinal Journet points out in *The Theology of the Church*, the most important moment in human history would not have been possible without Mary embracing her role as mother. God himself would not have entered our

57. Richardson, *You Found Me*, 132.

world and redeemed the world if it had not been for His mother, Mary.⁵⁸ Some people within the church hold Mary to such a high significance as saying,

When we say that Mary is the supreme realization of the Church, we mean that Mary is, in the Church, more a mother than the Church, more a Bride than the Church, more a Virgin than the Church. We mean that she is Mother, Bride, Virgin, *prior* to the Church and *for* the Church; that it is *in* her, above all, and *by* her that the Church is Mother, Bride, and Virgin.⁵⁹

Though her significance could be debated, her connecting point as a mother may be very relatable to mothers.

It is possible for the church itself to be a place of connection for women if they are able to see the church as mother. This project hoped to connect new moms with Christian women with the goal of connecting them into the church body. The church itself, however, could be a connecting point through the shared bond of motherhood.

Henri de Lubac, in *The Splendor of the Church*, gives a beautiful image of the church as mother. He paints a picture of how a mother loves and cares for her children.

This fruitful Mother continually presents us with new brothers; this universal Mother cares equally for all little and great alike – the ignorant and the wise, the ordinary parishioner and the picked body of consecrated souls. This venerable Mother makes sure for us the inheritance of the age and brings forth for us from her treasure things new and old. This patient Mother is always making a fresh start, untiringly, in her slow work of education and gathering together again, one by one, the threads of unity that her children are always tearing apart. This careful Mother protects us against the enemy who prowls around us seeking his prey; this loving Mother does not hold us back for herself but urges us on to the encounter with God, who is all love.⁶⁰

58. Charles Cardinal Journet, *The Theology of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press), 2004, 90.

59. Journet, *Theology of the Church*, 98.

60. Henri de Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward), 1956, 276.

What woman doesn't want to be mothered like that and in turn take care of her own children that way? Perhaps new moms can sense a familiarity, gratitude, or understanding of how the church cares for her children the way that new mom also cares for her own children.

In the Bible there are beautiful images of God himself reaching out in motherly ways. God speaks through the prophet Isaiah to say,

For a long time I have kept silent,
I have been quiet and held myself back.
But now, like a woman in childbirth,
I cry out, I gasp and pant (Isaiah 42:14).

God can even be relatable to women in their hard moments of childbearing. Moms connect as they share their story of finding or birthing their child and the effort it took. This is a great verse to show God approachable and sympathetic.

There is also wonderful imagery of God loving and caring for His children as a mother. Again, through Isaiah God says, "As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you" (Isaiah 66:13). And at another time through Isaiah, "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!" (Isaiah 49:15). This image of a mother nursing and caring for her child would strike at the heart of most women and draw them into the loving nature of God.

One image that Jesus gave was of another kind of mother. He said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing" (Matthew 23:37).

If women can see Mary, the church, and God as mother, perhaps they can let down some of their preconceptions about Christianity and see God as understanding in their role as a mother.

Conclusion

Conception, pregnancy, birth, and early childhood are pivotal and life-changing moments for women. The Bible gives evidence of how important this time is for God as well. As women are encountering a whole new way of life, they need the support of other Christian women so they can raise their children in the Christian faith from an early age and be encouraged and cared for themselves. Moms have a huge responsibility and the church needs to come alongside them. This season in a woman's life is a unique opportunity to influence the faith of both mother and child.

CHAPTER THREE

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

In order to understand how the church can reach Millennial moms in their pivotal first years of having children, it must first understand who these Millennial women are. While not much has been written about Millennial moms, or even Millennial women specifically, there are many literary works about the Millennial Generation as a whole and subsequent subgroups within the generation. This review of literature will first give a picture of who is the Millennial Generation. It will then focus on the religious practices of those who make up the generation. It will end with some suggestions and insights that others have had about how to engage Millennials. As much detail as possible will be shown towards new Millennial moms in particular.

Why Study a Generation?

Missiologists study the best ways to reach particular people groups. Missions expert Ed Stetzer writes “Missiology is accomplished at the intersection of gospel, culture, and the church.”¹ The gospel is the same across generations. Every generation needs to hear the story of creation, fall, restoration, and redemption. But each generation is specifically placed in a time in history. This alone gives every American generation a different culture. To be able to reach Millennial moms, their culture, specific to their generation, must be studied.

1. Ed Stetzer, “What Is a Missiologist?”, last modified June 10, 2015, accessed July 29, 2019, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2013/june/what-is-missiologist.html>.

What is culture? Andy Crouch defines culture in the following way. “We make sense of the world by making something of the world. The human quest for meaning is played out in human making: the finger-painting, omelet-stirring, chair-crafting, snow-swishing activities of culture. Meaning and making go together – culture, you could say, is the activity of making meaning.”² How are these women making sense of their world and making meaning in their world?

In much the same way as learning the culture of a particular people, Paul Hiebert believes that to reach a people-group, missionaries must understand their particular worldview. One way missiologists discover their worldview, is to look at their wisdom traditions, which could include their songs, parables, and stories. It is in these that a generation’s deep beliefs and morals are stored and preserved.³

Hiebert believes that the church must reach people in their specific human context. “The church in each locale, as a community of faith, must define what it means to be Christian in its particular sociocultural and historical setting. It must take responsibility for keeping biblical orthodoxy, and it must do so by defining how Christianity is different from its cultural surroundings...The process of maintaining true faith in this world and age is ongoing, for each generation must learn anew to think biblically about being Christian in its particular context.”⁴

According to Hiebert, to reach a group of people, the church must understand how each generation is living in its particular context. There are many similarities between generations,

2. Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press), 2013, 24.

3. Paul Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic), 2008, 100.

4. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 326.

as all generations must learn what it means to live in the image of God in this fallen world. The Millennial Generation, however, was set in this time in history with a particular culture and worldview that is slightly different than any other generation.

Who Are the Millennials in History?

The first issue that must be addressed concerns the parameters for who is in the Millennial Generation. There is some debate over when the Millennial Generation begins and ends. Thom S. Rainer and Jess Rainer, authors of *The Millennials: Connecting to America's Largest Generation*, believe that the Millennial Generation is the group of people born between the years 1980 and 2000.⁵ They base their date range on the trends in live births. After a live birth slump that lasted during the time when Gen X was being born, there was a spike in births in the year 1980. There was not a large statistical difference in the number of live births in the year 2000 but Rainer and Rainer believe a generation should not be longer than 20 years. During this 20-year span, an estimated seventy-eight million live births took place.⁶

Neil Howe and William Strauss study generational differences. In their book *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*, they lay out their argument for the date range for the Millennial Generation. They believe that each generation takes on a different persona and to identify a new generation, someone must find when new splits take place in these personas. There are three attributes to the persona of a generation: perceived membership, common

5. Thom S. Rainer and Jess W. Rainer, *The Millennials: Connecting to America's Largest Generation* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group), 2001, 4.

6. Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 13.

beliefs and behaviors, and a common location in history. They believe that Millennial births began in 1982. This is the year where people began to identify as Millennials. Those born during this time have similar attitudes towards family, career, romance, risk, and sex. They are in a specific time in history where none of them can remember watching the Challenger explode.⁷ It could also be added that they were at a unique time in history where they were alive but not yet adults when the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 took place.

Tim Elmore, author of *Generation iY: Our Last Chance to Save Their Future*, refers to Millennials as Generation Y and he defines them as those born between 1984 and 2002. He does, however, see a sharp contrast between those born before and after 1990. Because those born after 1990 have relied so heavily on technology their entire lives, he refers to them as generation iY.⁸

In her book *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled – and More Miserable Than Ever Before*, Jean Twenge writes, “For many of the studies find that when you were born has more influence on your personality and attitudes than the family who raised you. Or, in the words of a prescient Arab proverb, ‘Men resemble the times more than they resemble their fathers.’”⁹

7. Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Vantage Books), 2000, Location 933-1092, Kindle.

8. Tim Elmore, *Generation iY: Our Last Chance to Save Their Future* (Atlanta: Poet Gardner Publishing), 2010, 13.

9. Jean Twenge, *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled – and More Miserable Than Ever Before* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc), 1994, 4.

In a *Time Magazine* cover article from 2013, Joel Stein, after taking in all of the data on date range, decided to go with the years 1980 through 2000.¹⁰ While this chapter will look at the literary work of those who move the boundaries slightly, the date range for Millennials in this thesis will also be 1980 through 2000. It will also acknowledge that there are sub generations within the Millennial Generation, especially those born after 1991.

Millennials are different than the generations that preceded them. Most of the twenty-first century has been made up of the G.I. Generation, the Silent Generation, the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials. These previous generations have greatly impacted the culture and who the Millennial Generation has become and is becoming.

The G.I. Generation has been referred to by Tom Brokaw as the “greatest generation.” This generation is looked back on fondly for pulling themselves out of the Great Depression, winning the race to the moon, getting the country through WWII, and creating towns and suburbia for their children. They were upbeat, high-achieving, and liked to work as teams. Many Americans mourn that these values were lost and as a result, adults tried to instill them in young Millennials. There is hope that Millennials will fill the void lost by the G.I. generation as they are dying out.¹¹

The Silent Generation makes up many of the Millennial grandparents. They were too young to help during WWII. Many felt smothered by their families during their childhood and rebelled with hands-off child-raising and a divorce boom. They started more open attitudes

10. Joel Stein, “Millennials: The Me, Me, Me Generation”, May 21, 2013, accessed June 24, 2019, <https://time.com/247/millennials-the-me-me-me-generation/>.

11. Howe and Strauss, *Millennials Rising*, location 1136-1163, Kindle.

about sex and drugs. They are currently the wealthiest and earliest retiring generation in American history and have used this to dote on their Millennial grandchildren.¹²

The Baby Boom generation has had a huge influence on Millennials. Most early Millennials have parents from this generation. They are teachers and coaches and are leading the trends for families and schools and they have impacted an entire generation.¹³

Generation X is the generation leading up to the Millennials. They are known for being anti-everything and their grunge and distrust. Their generation usually has a negative connotation to others and themselves and much of what Millennials are trying to become is a push back to their negativity.¹⁴

All of these recent, previous generations have helped contribute to who the Millennial Generation currently is and who they will become. According to Howe and Strauss, Millennials will “deal with the answer to the problem facing Xers. They will show what can be done about over-the-top free agency, social splintering, cultural exhaustion, and civic decay in an era when Americans are increasingly yearning for community. The Millennial solution will be to set high standards, get organized, team up, and do civic deeds. They will also deal with the perceived excess of Boomers – the narcissism, impatience, constant focus on talk over action. They will turn to community, patience, trust, and a new focus on action over talk.”¹⁵

12. Howe and Strauss, *Millennials Rising*, location 1173–1182, Kindle.

13. Howe and Strauss, *Millennials Rising*, location 1213, Kindle.

14. Howe and Strauss, *Millennials Rising*, location 5653, Kindle.

15. Howe and Strauss, *Millennials Rising*, location 1515, Kindle.

At the time of this thesis, in 2019, Millennials are ages 20 to 39. Jeffery Arnett has coined a phrase for much of this life phase as *emerging adulthood*.¹⁶ This applies mostly to the younger half of Millennials. He believes that these years are not just considered an extended adolescence because these adults are free from parental control. He also believes that many of them have not yet reached young adulthood because that would imply marriage and starting a family. It is a unique phase that has only been around since Gen X but which he sees as a marked time in life which will be around for generations to come.¹⁷

Erik Erikson found that during adolescence, around ages 10-18, a person must deal with identity versus role confusion. He believed that this is the central crisis of this stage in life. Individuals are trying to figure out their niche in society. He also found that there can be a prolonged adolescence in industrialized societies like the United States.¹⁸ Arnett believes that this is now typically happening in the emerging adulthood time instead of simply during adolescence while the children are still living at home with their parents.¹⁹

Life for Millennials

A quick portrait of this generation would show them as overwhelmed, overconnected, and overprotected.²⁰ They are stressed out about all that life is throwing at them. They are

16. Jeffrey Jenson Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties* (New York: Oxford University Press), 2004, 3.

17. Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 3-4.

18. Erik H. Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton Company, 1968) 150.

19. Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 8.

20. Elmore, *Generation iY*, 31.

overconnected to technology and they are dependent on it. They are overprotected by helicopter parents who wanted the best for their own lives which translated to creating the best life they could imagine for their children.

They are the most racially and ethnically diverse generation in America's history thus far. They have the lowest population of Caucasians.²¹ This is a trend that is likely to continue as they do not see anything wrong with mixed marriages and one in seven US marriages were mixed marriages in 2010.²²

Millennials are not very religious. Only 13 percent of them consider any type of spirituality important in their lives. Most of them do not really think about religion.²³

They have grown up in a world of technology. During their childhoods many had computers in their homes and when the oldest were in high school the majority of them had a cell phone. The youngest of the generation can barely remember a time without cell phones. They are living in a world where they are always connected to everyone but scared about missing out on something. Seventy percent of them check their phones every hour and many suffer from phantom pocket-vibration syndrome where they mistakenly believe they feel their phone vibrate in their pocket. They are less empathetic because they have not had the opportunities to process emotions face-to-face with other people.²⁴

21. Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 80.

22. Twenge, *Generation Me*, location 682, Kindle.

23. Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 22.

24. Joel Stein, "Millennials: The Me, Me, Me Generation".

They are influenced by music, TV and the internet. Over half of them find these to be positive influences in their lives. In fact, the three of these media outlets outrank religion and spouse in their weight of influence to Millennials.²⁵

They are relational and deeply committed to their family. When Rainer asked them what is most important in their life, the number one answer was family, at 61 percent. The number two answer was friends.²⁶ Rainer writes, “This generation is truly a relationship generation. If anyone fails to grasp that reality, they have failed to understand the Millennials.”²⁷

They also want a mentor. Three out of four of them say they would like a leader to come alongside of them. Forty percent of them report having a mentor in their life.²⁸

They are educated. At the turn of the century, they were on track to become America’s most educated generation. In 2007, of those ages 25-29, 30 percent had a college degree. That is the highest rate ever recorded for that age group.²⁹ Their education is the third most important factor to them and only falls behind relationships. Rainer writes, “They don’t know another world than one where they pursue education without question.”³⁰ Because of this, Rainer considers them the “learning generation.” Ninety-five percent of them agree with the

25. Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 198-199.

26. Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 74.

27. Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 107.

28. Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 41.

29. Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 3.

30. Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 20.

statement “I have a great appetite for learning.”³¹ Howe and Strauss found that eight out of ten of them say it’s “cool to be smart” and a record number of them took AP courses.³²

When choosing a job, Rainer found that they have five big factors; work/life balance, making the most amount of money, having fun on the job, flexibility, and a structure that includes feedback. These were found as important by at least eight out of ten of those they interviewed.³³ They want to make money but most of this money is used on experiences and not on material possessions. They want the flexibility to be able to spend time with friends and family. They also want a work environment that is enjoyable and gives them opportunity for feedback and growth.

Twenge found a large generational difference between Boomers and Millennials in their views of work-life balance. Millennials work to live and Boomers live to work. One third of Millennials say work is just to make a living.³⁴ Work is more of a means to an end.

While they are motivated by money, they are confused by finances.³⁵ Rainer found that 83 percent of them said that having a high income was important to them. “Millennials see money as a major motivating factor in their lives. They may assign noble motives to their desires for income and wealth, but money is still a huge issue for them. At least in this regard, they are not that much different than their Boomer parents.”³⁶

31. Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 118.

32. Howe and Strauss, *Millennials Rising*, location 209, Kindle.

33. Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 128-138.

34. Twenge, *Generation Me*, 264.

35. Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 109.

36. Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 109-110.

They are tolerant. The only thing they aren't supposed to tolerate are those who are intolerant. Twenge writes, "They absorbed the lesson of tolerance with their baby food – not just for race and religion but for sexual orientation. It also extends to beliefs, feelings and all kinds of other intangibles. Just about the only difference that wasn't good? Someone who was prejudiced."³⁷

Christian Smith, author of *Lost in Transition: the Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*, had similar findings in his third wave of surveys and interviews with emerging adults from the National Study of Youth and Religion. He believes that it is the fault of the older adults around them and the culture that they have created. These Millennials see morals as a matter of individual choice where everyone chooses what is best for them and no one is allowed to judge someone else's motives or decisions. Some believe there is no true way to measure if something is right or wrong.³⁸ Rainer considered the phrase "Can we all just get along" as the defining issue for this generation.³⁹

They are more supportive of same-sex marriage than any previous generation.⁴⁰ No one can tell them who they are supposed to fall in love with or what a family is supposed to look like.

A study conducted in 1924 found that the traits mothers most wanted in their children were strict obedience, loyalty to the church, and good manners. A similar study conducted in

37. Twenge, *Generation Me*, 31.

38. Christian Smith, Kari M. Hojara, Hilary A. Davidson, Patricia Snell Herzog, *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (New York: Oxford University Press), 2011, 21.

39. Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 153.

40. Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 92.

1988 found that few mothers chose those traits but instead chose independence and tolerance.⁴¹ Yes, they were fed tolerance in their baby food.

They are doing a lot for the community. Rainer found that three out of four of them clearly stated that their desire was to serve others in society.⁴² Some researchers, however, believe that the reasons they are serving is more for selfish ambitions than to help others. Millennials are seen as a socially conscious generation but are actually contributing less to charities and causes than did Boomers or Gen Xers.⁴³

Defining Characteristic of Millennials

The word that seem to be used the most when talking about this generation is entitled.⁴⁴ Reading through the available literature will give a different picture of who a Millennial is, depending on who wrote about the generation. In their books, Strauss, Howe, and Rainer praise the Millennial Generation. They believe that they could be the next greatest generation.⁴⁵ But in their books and articles, Twenge and Elmore bash who it is that the Millennials have become. The more positive books were written years before the negative reviews. Perhaps life has happened to the Millennial Generation or perhaps the second half of the generation is very different from the first.

41. Twenge, *Generation Me*, 28.

42. Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 166.

43. Twenge, *Generation Me*, 100.

44. Twenge, *Generation Me*, 98.

45. Howe and Strauss, *Millennials Rising*, location 90, Kindle.

From a young age, Millennials were told they were special. In the 1980's Americans fell in love with having babies again. The well-being of children was talked about at national levels as people wanted to raise their children correctly and shield them from latchkey houses, pornography, drug abuse, and other harmful practices. Babies and children were celebrated. Even Hollywood celebrated babies and pregnancy with celebrities turning it into a fad. In 80's movies and 90's movies, children were seen as cute and rarely ever bad.⁴⁶

It was a time when women were choosing to have children and it was desired. If they were unable to conceive, medical science was working on that. The first US infant conceived in vitro was in 1981. The first surrogate mom donated an egg in 1983.⁴⁷ It was a privilege to be able to have children and these children were doted upon.

Around this time, a correlation was noticed between those with high self-esteem and those who were successful. It was decided that children needed to have high self-esteem from a young age in order to be successful in life.⁴⁸ Suddenly children were constantly told that they were unique and special. Even in Christian movies like *VeggieTales*, the biggest message was, "God made you special and He loves you very much."⁴⁹ This is the cultural soup in which Millennials spent their childhood.

Jean Twenge believes, "GenMe is not as much self-absorbed as self-important. They take it for granted that they're unique, special individuals, so they don't need to think about

46. Howe and Strauss, *Millennials Rising*, location 714-767, Kindle.

47. Howe and Strauss, *Millennials Rising*, location 1785, Kindle.

48. Twenge, *Generation Me*, 86.

49. *VeggieTales: Madame Blueberry*, directed by Mike Nawrocki (Big Idea Production, 1998), Digital (Right Now Media, 2020).

it.”⁵⁰ She says that their focus on the individual need isn’t necessarily self-absorbed but it comes from living in a world where they believe they are important. It is not that they are spoiled and getting everything they want, “GeMe simply takes it for granted that we should all feel good about ourselves, we are all special, and we all deserve to follow our dreams.”⁵¹

Back in 2013 *The New York Times* ran a cover article titled “Millennials: The Me Me Me Generation.” In his research on Millennials Joel Stein bashed them for their narcissistic tendencies. He noted that this doesn’t just happen in America or in rich-kid areas but that it is happening in China with the one-child policy and in poor neighborhoods. He paints a picture of how Millennials grew up versus how a Boomer grew up.

Where in the 1950s families displayed a wedding photo, a school photo and maybe a military photo in their homes, the average middle-class American family today walks amid 85 pictures of themselves and their pets. Millennials have come of age in the era of the quantified self, recording their daily steps on FitBit, their whereabouts every hour of every day on PlaceMe and their genetics data on 23 and Me.⁵²

In a graduation commencement speech given to the class of 2012, English teacher David McCullough Jr informs the graduating student that they are not special. He tells them this fact over and over. He says that despite what their families and society have convinced them of, they are not the center of the universe and they are not special. His speech went viral with overwhelming support from people of all ages.⁵³

50. Twenge, *Generation Me*, 8.

51. Twenge, *Generation Me*, 63.

52. Joel Stein, “Millennials: The Me, Me, Me Generation”.

53. “You Are Not Special Commencement Speech from Wellesley High School”, David McCullough Jr., June 8, 2012, video, 12:45, https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=_lfxYhtf8o4.

It is not the fault of Millennials that they see themselves as special. They have been fed it since they were born. Baby Boomers set up their world to be a place of self-esteem but instead they created a world of self-importance.

In the early 2000's all of this self-esteem was creating a generation with great optimism. In their research, Thom and Jess Rainer found that Millennials are very hopeful. Ninety-six percent of them agreed with the statement "I believe I can do something great."⁵⁴ In subsequent interviews with specific Millennials they found that many of those great things they wanted to do involved helping others.⁵⁵ Rainer writes, "The Millennials tend to be upbeat, positive, and happy. But they are realists as well. They know that not all is well with the world. The Boomer generation knew that and protested it. The Gen X generation knew that and was depressed about it. And the Millennials know that, but they believe they can have a role in changing it."⁵⁶

In their research, Howe and Strauss found similar results with 92 percent agreeing with the statement "I am usually happy." Eighty-three percent of them are either "completely" or "mostly" satisfied with their lives. This comes in a time when the life satisfaction of older adults has flatlined or declined.⁵⁷ They used the word "confident" to describe this generation at the turn of the century as many of them were graduating and going off to college. Most of these teens agreed that people their age should be optimistic about their career and future and four

54. Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 16.

55. Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 18.

56. Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 20.

57. Howe and Strauss, *Millennials Rising*, location 4097, Kindle.

out of five of them believed that they would be better off financially than their parents. These opinions rose sharply in the 1990's.⁵⁸

But then as this generation started leaving high school, life hit hard. September 11, 2001 showed these students the frailty of life. Rainer believes that this day profoundly affected their world and they could no longer see life through the lens of safety and security. It may even be what defines the whole generation.⁵⁹

A few years after that as many were entering the time that Jeffery Arnett considers Emerging Adulthood, the economy started to tank. All of the optimism of going off to a great college to get a great job to make a lot of money started to fall away.

Twenge believes that they faced a collision of "Adulthood Shock." "Their childhoods of constant praise, self-esteem boosting, and unrealistic expectations did not prepare them for an increasingly competitive workplace and the economic squeeze created by underemployment and rising costs. After a childhood of buoyancy, GenMe is working harder to get less."⁶⁰ She believes that they have a fear YOYO, You're On Your Own. They no longer trust people. In a 2012 study, only 16 percent of teens agreed that they could trust other people. In the same year almost half of high school students said most people are just looking out for themselves. This is the lowest level of trust seen in 36 years of surveys and Twenge believes it suggests a culture growing more disconnected and away from communities.⁶¹

58. Howe and Strauss, *Millennials Rising*, location 4115, Kindle.

59. Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 132.

60. Twenge, *Generation Me*, 10.

61. Twenge, *Generation Me*, 47-48.

Despite all their self-esteem, they were still stressed. As children, their anxiety rates were already alarming compared to previous generations. “Normal” schoolchildren in the 1980’s reported higher levels of anxiety than child psychiatric patients in the 1950’s.⁶²

The world itself is a harder place for psychiatric health. Even though they lived through the Great Depression and two world wars, only one to two percent of Americans born before 1915 experienced a major depressive episode during their lifetime. Today it is estimated that 15-20 percent of the population will experience major depression.⁶³ Some studies show it could be closer to 50 percent of the population. As later Millennials were on college campuses the number of those being treated for depression continued to grow. At Kansas State University the number of students treated for depression doubled between 1988 and 2001 and those who were treated for suicidal tendencies tripled.⁶⁴

In 2007, The American College Health Association surveyed the largest randomized sample of college students since its inception. They found that:

- 94 percent of students said they felt overwhelmed by their lifestyles
- 44 percent reported feeling so depressed it was difficult to function
- just less than 10 percent were suicidal⁶⁵

Millennials were told they were special, so they should expect to get a good job, make a lot of money, buy a giant house with a white picket fence, and find a wonderful romantic

62. Twenge, *Generation Me*, 145.

63. Twenge, *Generation Me*, 142.

64. Twenge, *Generation Me*, 143.

65. Elmore, *Generation iY*, 19.

partner with whom to enjoy life. But as they are learning that their expectations cannot be fulfilled, they are focusing on their feelings and they are coming up empty. Jeffery Arnett believes these young adults don't just want a job, they want a calling.⁶⁶ They can't figure out how this calling works so they are hurting.

Twenge found that despite all of the hype of the 80's and 90's about giving children self-confidence, as they are entering the real world, fewer in 2005 would agree "I have more self-confidence than most people." She believes this suggests that by adulthood the Millennial special-ness has worn out as life didn't work out and it is replaced by unhappiness and regret.⁶⁷

Starting Their Own Families

Because Millennials find TV informative and a positive influence for them, they are learning what marriage and family looks like through the shows they see on the television. No longer is it the happy family in *Leave it to Beaver*. These young adults grew up on shows like *Married with Children* and *Friends*. The fragmentation of the family is all around them.

About 65 percent of Millennials will cohabit with a significant other prior to marriage. In the 1960s this was only ten percent.⁶⁸

Young adults are marrying later and later as emerging adulthood continues farther into their twenties. The average age that men marry is 29 and women marry at 27. When Boomers were young adults they were getting married at 23 and 21. Only 20 percent of Millennials in

66. Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 15.

67. Twenge, *Generation Me*, 149.

68. Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 3.

their twenties are married. In a recent Pew Center poll, 44 percent of Millennials say they thought marriage was becoming obsolete.⁶⁹

Rainer still believes that Millennials will bring back the family. A theme throughout many of the interviews he conducted was the longing of a connected family. More than 80 percent of them think they will only marry once. It may not be a traditional family as was once the TV norm, but it will be a connected family no matter what it looks like.⁷⁰

What do Millennials say is the beginning of adulthood? A nationwide survey found this generation believes the milestone for becoming an adult is having their first child. The median age for birthing their first child is 27 years old.⁷¹

Because research repeatedly shows the importance of family to Millennials, what will this mean when they begin to have their own families? They are connected with their own parents, but what about their own children? Rainer writes,

Anyone seeking to understand and connect with this generation must grasp their love and commitment to their families. They will choose vocations that allow them to spend more time with their families. They will spend money on goods and services they perceive benefit their families. They will be loyal to institutions that help them strengthen their families. Our second choice for a title for this book was *The Family Generation*. You truly can't understand the Millennials until you understand their commitment to their families.⁷²

They had helicopter parents choosing their every waking moment. Now they are going to be raising a new generation of children. Seventy-four percent of 2012 college freshmen said

69. Twenge, *Generation Me*, 116.

70. Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 31.

71. Elmore, *Generation iY*, 55.

72. Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, Location 4009, Kindle.

that “raising a family” was an important life goal compared to only 59 percent of Boomers who said this in 1977.⁷³

How many children will this generation have? Of those Rainer interviewed, almost half believe they will have two children. Nine percent think they will have one child. Seven percent think they will have four children. Four percent think they will have five or more. Only 13 percent do not want to have any children.⁷⁴

Many of their children will be born out of wedlock. In the 1960s, children born to unmarried mothers was only five percent. In 2012 the number was soaring to 41 percent.⁷⁵

Having a child can be hard for a single or a married Millennial. After living for almost 30 years as the center of the universe, all of a sudden there is a tiny human being who demands their full attention and their financial resources.

In an analysis of data from almost 50,000 people, Twenge and her team found that couples with children were less satisfied with their marriages than childless couples were. This negative trend has only increased as the Millennials have started having children. They are experiencing a 42 percent greater drop in marital satisfaction after having kids. After doing their own research, the National Marriage Project concluded, “children seem to be a growing impediment for the happiness of marriages.”⁷⁶

73. Twenge, *Generation Me*, 286.

74. Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 68.

75. Twenge, *Generation Me*, 38.

76. Twenge, *Generation Me*, 133.

With Baby Boomers, having a child was a duty and a responsibility. It was not something that you chose. Now that couples are choosing when they start a family, there is a lot of pressure built up behind that decision. Most choices Millennials make are for flexibility and fun. Flexibility and fun are not words that are usually associated with a crying newborn. All of a sudden, a couple may be questioning why they started this family in the first place as they lose their own sense of self-control.

Arnett believes that many young people are waiting to have children and they adopt a “yes, but not yet,” mentality as they put it off later and later in life. They do this because it represents a closing of doors on things that are important to them like independence, spontaneity, and a sense of wide-open possibilities.⁷⁷ Having a child opens many doors but it also slams doors that new moms might not be ready to close or did not fully realize were going to close.

Finances are a part of this problem for new families. Childcare can cost more than in-state tuition at many colleges. It can cost more than a couple was spending on rent. In 2010, the average cost for infant care in most cities in the US ranged from \$11,000 to over \$20,000 a year.⁷⁸ This can be a huge chunk out of a young adult’s paycheck in a climate where the economy is already not favorable for those in their 20s or early 30s. In many states, housing in places with good schools is also extremely expensive.

Twenge sums it up like this, “One parent should stay at home, but to afford a house – and sometimes even the rent – both parents have to work. You ‘choose’ between expensive,

77. Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 6.

78. Twenge, *Generation Me*, 167-168.

difficult-to-find day care and renting an apartment where your child has no space to run around...Young people feel screwed no matter what they do – no wonder they’re so anxious.”⁷⁹

Families are forced to choose. Does the mom continue to work on her career, or does she stay home with the new baby? Most maternity leave is only six weeks. Some day care centers will not take babies before six months and some won’t take them before two years.⁸⁰

Plus, these young moms have been told from an early age that they are special. They are told to work hard in school so they can get good grades and go to a good college and get a good job. They have student loan debt from this college that they attended. As they are finally starting to make something of a career, are they supposed to give it up? Is that really something that you do when you are “special”? Only 1 in 1,000 incoming college students chose “full-time homemaker” as their probable career.⁸¹ As the first of this generation was finishing college, 56 percent of undergraduates in the US were women.⁸² They were also obtaining as many law and business degrees as men and were almost equal in graduating with medical degrees.⁸³ They were, and continue to be, working hard in school and in their career fields and excelling.

On the other hand, women are bombarded all the time with the message that they must put their family first, and this includes staying home to raise their child. How many times do

79. Twenge, *Generation Me*, 170.

80. Twenge, *Generation Me*, 168.

81. Twenge, *Generation Me*, 286.

82. Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 7.

83. Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 7.

women hear, “you wouldn’t really want someone else raising your child, would you?” They are expected to co-sleep, nurse their child for at least one year, and be there for every big and small moment.

In her book on issues that many young women are experiencing, Jan Jacobs Brumberg lists the goals of these women as “to be brainy and beautiful; to have an exciting \$75,000-a-year job; to nurture two wonderful children in consort with a supportive but equally high-powered husband.” To achieve such a perfect life, “young women must be extremely demanding of themselves...the kind of personal control required to become the new Superwoman.”⁸⁴

There is no way to do it all. Women feel like they are a failure at home and in the workplace. In the book *Midlife Crisis at 30*, Lia Macko and Kerry Rubin put it this way, “The ‘you can do anything’ promise has a tendency to transform into an unrealistic ‘you should be everything’ brand of guilt.”⁸⁵

With technology now, moms are looking at friends on Facebook and celebrities and seeing their highlight reel of what having a baby is like. Many moms only put up the happy pictures of the big and small moments with their babies. This just adds to the term Twenge calls “the new momism.” Moms are to know where their children are all the time. But they aren’t just to know where they are, they are to be actively engaged and entertaining their children. They are to be feeding them the perfect food set up in the perfect home. She believes this is what happens when these competitive women left their boardrooms to be stay at home moms.

84. Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *Fasting Girls: The History of Anorexia Nervosa* (New York: Random House, Inc, 2000), 267.

85. Lia Macko and Kerry Rubin, *Midlife Crisis at 30: How the Stakes Have Changed for a New Generation – and What to Do about It* (New York: Plume Penguin, 2004), 59.

They bring that competitive nature home with them. After all, they are special, so what they do as moms must be special as well.⁸⁶ No wonder Pinterest parties and gender reveal parties are important.

These women are confused and hurting. They were told they could be anything. They were told family was the most important thing in the world. How can they make their life work?

The Religious Landscape of Millennials

The media shows the religious landscape of Millennials as dismal. Is it really as bad as it seems? According to the research done by Rick Richardson, presented in his book *You Found Me: New Research on How Unchurched Nones, Millennials, and Irreligious Are Surprisingly Open to Christian Faith*, there is a bit of a Chicken Little syndrome. The landscape is not great, but it is not as hyperbolically horrible as magazines and news organizations like to show.⁸⁷

One myth is that Millennials are flocking out of the church. Research shows that in reality 66 percent of these young adults stopped or will stop attending church between the ages of 18 and 22. This is sad news. But on a positive note, not all of them are gone for good. Of the Millennials who have left, 31 percent are now attending church two or more times a month. This would make the rate of those who leave the church and do not come back regularly at 46 percent.⁸⁸

86. Twenge, *Generation Me*, 250.

87. Rick Richardson, *You Found Me: New Research on How Unchurched, Nones, Millennials, and Irreligious Are Surprisingly Open to Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2019), location 467, Kindle.

88. Richardson, *You Found Me*, location 658, Kindle.

This is greater than a 50 percent retention rate of those Millennials who grew up in the church. This isn't great, but it is encouraging that 31 percent are returning. They are leaving the church at higher levels than previous generations, but they are returning between ages 25 and 34 at rates similar to the past.⁸⁹

Missiologist Ed Stetzer researched those outside the church and found that there are generally four categories of younger unchurched, with some overlap between the different categories. Category one is "always unchurched." They have never been involved in church. Category two is "de-churched." These are people who came to church as children or teenagers but later fell away. Category three is "friendly unchurched." They are not particularly upset at the church. Category four is "hostile unchurched." These are people who are angry at the church and have had some negative experiences with the church.⁹⁰

Of those who are unchurched, including always unchurched and those de-churched, 37 percent were hostile towards the church and 15 percent considered themselves friendly towards the church.⁹¹ Forty percent of them identify with a denomination or faith group.⁹²

The de-churched are the largest subgroup and make up 62 percent of the respondents. This means that more than 60 percent of the unchurched were not always unchurched but had

89. Richardson, *You Found Me*, location 683, Kindle.

90. Ed Stetzer, Richie Stanley, and Jason Hayes, *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches that Reach Them* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 9.

91. Stetzer, Stanley, and Hayes, *Lost and Found*, 12.

92. Stetzer, Stanley, and Hayes, *Lost and Found*, 20.

previously attended church weekly when they were growing up. Rainer found that they are usually more interested and receptive than the other types of younger unchurched.⁹³

A lot of attention recently has been put on the “nones.” Richardson found among the unchurched, those who identify as “nones” is over 1/3. In 2007, Pew Research surveyed 35,000 Americans and then followed up with them again in 2014. They discovered that the “nones” had grown from 16 percent of the population to 23 percent. The highest growth was with the younger generations. Among older Millennials (born 1981 -1989) the rate went from 25 to 35 percent and with younger Millennials (born 1990-1996) the rate had risen to 36 percent.

“Nones” are the fastest growing religious identification in the nation.⁹⁴

Millennials make up 43 percent of the unchurched “nones.” The percent of unchurched Millennials who identify as “nones” equals the percent of unchurched that identify as Christians.⁹⁵

Within the “nones” there are different subgroups. Those who consider themselves atheists and agnostics make up seven percent of the US population with a three percent growth between 2007 and 2014. Those who believe “nothing in particular” make up 16 percent of all the US population with a four percent growth between 2007 and 2014.⁹⁶

While many Millennials consider themselves “nones,” it does not mean that they are irreligious. Spirituality is seen as fluid and is really just a feeling of being connected to

93. Stetzer, Stanley, and Hayes, *Lost and Found*, 11, 20.

94. Richardson, *You Found Me*, location 174, Kindle.

95. Richardson, *You Found Me*, location 530-539, Kindle.

96. Richardson, *You Found Me*, location 593, Kindle.

something larger than themselves. Of the “nones,” over 60 percent still believe in God, 81 percent believe in a force higher than themselves that can be reached through prayer, and 20 percent pray daily.⁹⁷

Stetzer believes that there is an abundance of spiritual confusion that is permeating the belief system of the unchurched. He found that: 43 percent of Millennial unchurched said they were spiritual but not religious, 31 percent claimed to be both spiritual and religious, 9 percent said they were religious but not spiritual, and 18 percent said that they were neither. With the culture this generation has grown up in, it is easy to see how many would simply believe in the “big guy in the sky” and “you believe what you believe, I believe what I believe.” It is hard for them to even comprehend a religion where there is Truth and expectations and a personal relationship with God. Even among those who agree that the Biblical God exists, 53 percent believe that God is no different than other gods.⁹⁸

Why are They Leaving the Church?

Why is it that two-thirds of 18-22 year olds leave the church? In *Essential Church: Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts*, Rainer lays out his top ten reasons for why Millennials leave the church. The top answers include; wanting a break from church, church members being judgmental and hypocritical, they didn’t feel connected to people in their church, or they

97. Richardson, *You Found Me*, location 593-602, Kindle.

98. Stetzer, Stanley, and Hayes, *Lost and Found*, 20 – 22.

disagreed with a political or social issue. His conclusion was that these emerging adults stopped coming to church because they didn't see it as essential to their lives.⁹⁹

As they go off to college or trade school their lives are changing and many have to make decisions about how they will spend their time. When they were in high school, 80 percent of them planned to keep their faith after graduation.¹⁰⁰ Interestingly, it isn't the colleges who are necessarily the enemy here, as the drop off rate of those going to college versus those not going to college is very similar.¹⁰¹ With only so much time in a day they have to eliminate something and church is one of the first things to go.

Rainer found that they are not mad at the church. Most of them have a positive view of church and faith. They just don't see a reason to stay in church because it isn't essential. It's just another thing to do.¹⁰² Stetzer found that with the younger unchurched, about three out of four of them believe that Jesus makes a positive difference in a person's life and almost as many agree on some level that the Christian church is helpful to society as a whole.¹⁰³

While those are positive statistics that Stetzer found about the views of Millennial unchurched, he also found some negatives attitudes. Two-thirds of them believe that the church is full of hypocrites, which they define as people who criticize others for doing the same things that they are doing.¹⁰⁴

99. Thom. S. Rainer and Sam S. Rainer III, *Essential Church: Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), location 171-181, Kindle.

100. Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church*, location 541, Kindle.

101. Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church*, location 1616, Kindle.

102. Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church*, location 595, Kindle.

103. Stetzer, Stanley, and Hayes, *Lost and Found*, 27, 32.

In his research with Barna, David Kinnaman found that young people are already weary of people because of the advertisement culture they live in and they believe that the church has too many hypocrites. For them, it isn't just seeing in the media about the moral failures of prominent church leaders, but that they are finding holes in the lives of Christians that they know personally.¹⁰⁵

Rainer believes this hypocrisy runs deeper than what they experience with people in the church. He sees it starting in the home. From a young age these kids saw their families say church was a part of their lives. But that was it. They would go to church when it was convenient. Religion was not something they talked about outside of church or incorporated into their lives. They did not see their parents live out their faith.¹⁰⁶

This fits with what Christian Smith found with his nationwide survey of Millennial teenagers between the years 2001–2005. During this time in their faith, many teens reported that their faith was very important to them. In the way they actually talked about their faith, however, Smith observed it was more like background music that doesn't fully come out in their lives.¹⁰⁷

In fact, Smith discovered that a whole new religion was sweeping across America that he referred to as Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD). MTD says that God exists and created the world and He watches over what is happening with humans on earth. As is true with most

104. Stetzer, Stanley, and Hayes, *Lost and Found*, 32.

105. David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity...and Why it Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books), 2007, 42.

106. Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church*, location 1713, Kindle.

107. Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press), 2005, 159.

religions, God wants people to be nice to each other. The main purpose in life is to be happy and God doesn't intervene too much in human affairs except when someone needs help with a problem. MTD also says that good people go to heaven when they die.¹⁰⁸

Where are they learning this new form of Christianity from? Sure, they can find it in the pop culture and the media, but by far, Smith found that the single most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of young people is their parents. He went so far as to say that with parents and other influential adults, they will most likely "get what they are."¹⁰⁹

During their childhood and teenage years these Millennials saw their parents say and do two different things with their faith. Now that they are emerging adults, they do not want the watered-down faith that many of their parents had. Between 2007 and 2014 the number of Americans who identified as Christian had dropped seven percentage points from 78 to 71 percent. But most of these were just nominal Christians who were letting go of their identification with the Christian faith.¹¹⁰ Millennials will not just go to church because they are somewhat affiliated with it. They will sacrifice for it or they will decide that it is not essential to their lives.

Millennials Finding Faith

There is a huge opportunity to get these Millennials into a church for the first time if they are completely unchurched or get them back into church if they are de-churched. According to

108. Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 162-163.

109. Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 261.

110. Richardson, *You Found Me*, location 530, Kindle.

the CIA World Factbook, 52 percent of the US population claims a protestant church background. That is about 160 million people. With only 28 percent of the US population attending a protestant church, that leaves about 75 million people who claim Christianity but aren't in church.¹¹¹ Richardson uses statistics that show that there are 143 million unchurched people in the US (110 million adults). If they formed their own country it would be the 10th largest nation on earth ahead of Mexico and Japan.¹¹² That is a lot of people. And as noted earlier, many of them are not hostile towards the church.

Rainer sees the potential for the harvest as evident. Millennials are searching and they realize there is something missing. They are receptive to hearing.¹¹³

Of those who came back to church, between 65 and 90 percent of them are active now through the witness and relationship of another person. Relationships are huge for Millennials.¹¹⁴

Ed Stetzer believes that Millennials are very open to individual story and invitation. He found that: 80 percent said they would be open to someone telling them about what they believed about Christianity, 61 percent would study the Bible if a friend asked them to, and 47 percent would view it positively if their friend became a Christian.¹¹⁵

111. Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church*, location 267, Kindle.

112. Richardson, *You Found Me*, location 547, Kindle.

113. Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church*, location 1242, Kindle.

114. Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church*, 1540.

115. Stetzer, Stanley, and Hayes, *Lost and Found*, 36.

The biggest key to getting Millennials back in the church? Relationship. Of the unchurched, 50 percent said that if friends invited them to church they would respond positively. It rises to 55 percent positive if they were invited by family. In fact, 56 percent of unchurched people identify as Christian and 75 percent of those say that an invitation from a family member or friend would be effective in getting them to church. One-third of those unchurched expect to return to church regularly at some time in the future. Among Millennials, 39 percent of all unchurched, 25 million young adults, expect to return to church in the future. That is more than any other age group.¹¹⁶

Some churches have found ways to engage Millennials in church. Through research people are finding what it is that Millennials are looking for.

Kara Powel and her team at Fuller did extensive research on this topic among emerging adults and discovered six core commitments that a church needs to grow young. Most of these core commitments center on taking Millennials seriously. Millennials must have places for real leadership and real service. The message of Jesus cannot be watered down. These emerging adults must be able to find authentic community.¹¹⁷

Rainer believes that for Millennials to be drawn to church, it has to be seen as essential in their lives. He suggests doing this by being simple, deepening their knowledge of God's Word and truth, having high expectations, and learning to multiply spiritually.¹¹⁸

116. Richardson, *You Found Me*, location 946-1061, Kindle.

117. Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin, *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Bake Books, 2016), location 540-549, Kindle.

118. Rainer and Rainer, *Essential church*, location 218-229, Kindle.

Stetzer and others had very similar findings. They found that what this generation is looking for is community, empowerment, authenticity, and deep faith. This is not only what this generation is looking for, but it is what is keeping Millennials in churches that are filling with young people.

For the purposes of this paper, emphasis will be put on a couple of these ways to engage Millennials. It cannot be overstated how important relationships are for Millennials. Relationships are an important factor when choosing a job, they are important in bringing and inviting Millennials to church, and they are important in keeping Millennials in the church.

Millennials “long to belong.” Stetzer says that community is vital and that they must have genuine relationships with others in the church. They must have people they can call during both good and bad times and who will walk through life with them. He adds in the need for connection, which he also considers vital but is more of a mentoring or intergenerational ministry. Emerging adults want to learn from those who have already faced things that they are facing or are about to face. They want people to walk alongside them and advise them. Forty-seven percent of the Millennial unchurched said community was very important to them.¹¹⁹

The issue of community and relationships have been a hot topic for a while now. In *Bowling Alone*, Robert D. Putnam makes the case that social relationships in the US have been declining and this is not healthy. Even bowling used to be done in leagues but is now done alone. He reinforces what many Millennials are longing for, the need for community in the midst of business and constant change.¹²⁰

119. Stetzer, Stanley, and Hayes, *Lost and Found*, 68, 74.

120. Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).

Rosaria Butterfield is a huge proponent of creating community. She lives a life where her home is a place that many people can find community and support as they do life together. She believes that it is important to know our neighbors, how they struggle, and to walk through that with them.¹²¹

In order to reach these young adults as they are encountering adult problems, they are going to want real-world help and support. They want to know how others have done it so they can avoid their mistakes. They will be seeking advice on everything from living on their own, buying a house, and cooking, to significant relationships, getting married, starting a family, and parenting. The church has a wonderful opportunity for older women who have gone ahead of these young ladies to offer mentoring and support. They also have a great opportunity to bring together women who are experiencing these life struggles and learning moments to grow in them together. Donald McGavran's 1955 book, *The Bridges of God*, makes the point that people come to faith through relationships. He sees relationships as the bridges of God. As true as this was in 1955, it is just as true with Millennials today.¹²²

For other women to come alongside Millennials, they don't need to be experts themselves. Elmore believes these young people want a "guide on the side before they want a sage on the stage." They aren't looking for experts, especially if these experts don't feel authentic. They would rather have someone authentic to come beside them. They hunger more for relationship than for information; even relevant information.¹²³

121. Rosaria Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key: Practicing Radically Ordinary Hospitality in our Post-Christian World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway), 2018, 32-33.

122. Richardson, *You Found Me*, location 2823, Kindle.

123. Elmore, *Generation iY*, 50.

Churches who are growing with Millennials are ones who do not water down their message about Jesus and what He desires from them and yet are able to be authentic and relatable to emerging adults.¹²⁴ They are challenging people to live out their faith. This is different than the faith many of them saw with their parents.

Churches must be relevant in how they give the message of Jesus and speak to young adults. They must speak the culture of the people. A rural farm community in Indiana will relate differently than a suburb in Florida which will relate differently than a city out in California. Rainer says they must ask, “How can we best relate the unchanging gospel to the shifting culture around us?” And he says that churches that are able to do this are one step closer to reaching a new generation.¹²⁵ Stetzer believes that an effective evangelistic outreach will not be a “one size fits all” approach but it must be intentional and be out on the turf of those who are far from God.¹²⁶

Part of growing deep for Millennials is serving and reaching the community. This is especially true for them in reaching their friends and family for Christ. One of Rainer’s four major components for a growing church is that they are learning to multiply spiritually. Evangelism must be woven into everything that they do.¹²⁷ They must see themselves as a part of the family of God on mission with God fulfilling the Great Commission.

124. Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church*, location 218-229, Kindle.

125. Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church*, location 415-425, Kindle.

126. Stetzer, Stanley, and Hayes, *Lost and Found*, 14.

127. Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church*, location 218-229, Kindle.

One of the biggest reasons that Millennials leave the church is because of life change. But life change can also be one of the biggest reasons they return. Watching the trends in church attendance, Rainer writes, “In the end, dropouts who return tend to do so for the same reasons they left: changes that occur in their lives. Some get married and return; others have a child and feel that they need to ‘get back in church.’ Sometimes people have tragic events that prompt them to come back. Church attendance can become a cycle. Life changes; they leave. Life changes; they come back again. Another life change and they may be gone for good.”¹²⁸

In his book *Deep and Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched and Church People Love to Attend*, Andy Stanley was curious to find what it was that drew people to faith in the first place and what helped grow people’s faith throughout their lives. He found five major catalysts. In everyone’s story that he interviewed, they mentioned at least one of these catalysts. The five faith catalysts are: practical teaching, private discipleship, personal ministry, providential relationships, and pivotal life circumstances.¹²⁹

The last two catalysts he grouped together because he says they are different from the other three in the fact that the church has very little control over them. He says that those final two catalysts choose the individual and yet every single faith story he has ever had has included both of those components.¹³⁰

128. Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church*, location 1641, Kindle.

129. Andy Stanley, *Deep and Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched and Church People Love to Attend* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 108-109.

130. Stanley, *Deep and Wide*, 131-134.

While churches cannot control God providing great people to form relationships between those inside and outside the church, the church must make room for those relationships to develop. There must be facilitation between people so relationships can form.¹³¹

Every faith story has at least one pivotal circumstance. It could be something exciting or it could be something very painful. Stanley writes, “The challenge with this catalyst is that there’s no way to program a pivotal circumstance. We don’t see ‘em coming. We don’t schedule them.”¹³² The biggest factor is not so much what happens during those times. What really contributes or takes away from a person’s faith is how they *interpret* what they are seeing and experiencing. The two things that determine how someone will interpret their pivotal circumstances are their worldviews and who they are doing life with at the time.¹³³

Childbearing as a Pivotal Life Moment to Speak to Moms

One very pivotal moment in the life of a woman is when she has her first child. Having any subsequent children is also a pivotal life moment. While it is not always possible to see life changing moments before they happen, most women have about nine months of knowing that a baby is coming and those around these women are given time to notice that a big change is on the way.

131. Stanley, *Deep and Wide*, 131-137.

132. Stanley, *Deep and Wide*, 138.

133. Stanley, *Deep and Wide*, 140-141.

Are these women using this life changing moment to come back to church? In an interview sample of 394 re-churched young adults, 24 percent said that the reason they decided to return to church was because “I had children and felt it was time for them to start attending.”¹³⁴

Melinda Denton worked with Christian Smith and the NYSR on their nationwide survey of over 3,000 students in 2002 and 2003 that contributed to *Soul Searching*. She has subsequently worked with them on three further waves of this longitudinal study. Wave four was conducted in 2012-2013 when the participants were 23-29 years old. Part of the concentration on this last wave was to find out how family life, especially marriage and childbearing, affected religiosity.¹³⁵

She found that family life, both marriage and childbearing, do have an effect on the religiosity of Millennials. The biggest indicator of a growing faith was marriage, but she believes that this could be because the church endorses marriage, so those couples who are married feel at home and supported in a church. As the average age of this cohort gets into their 30's, she will be interested to see if childbearing is also affirmed as marriage is and thus brings more young families into the church.¹³⁶

Her research showed that people who are declining in their faith or not attending church are those who are cohabitating and single parents. Again, she believes that this is because this is not what the church shows as what a family is supposed to look like, so these individuals do not feel embraced like their married friends. She says that this is a huge area of growth for the

134. Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church*, location 3950, Kindle.

135. Melinda Denton, & Jeremy Uecker, *Rev Relig Res*, (2018) 60: 1, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13644-017-0308-3>, 7.

136. Melinda Denton, 10-11.

church. Churches must find ways to reach out to these young couples and parents or this could be a “lost opportunity”.¹³⁷

It is possible that one-fourth of Millennial moms will return when they have children but there are many who are having children out of wedlock and may not feel welcomed by the church. These moms are in the middle of pivotal life circumstances. For some women this is a change that is hard and good. But for some women it can be an extremely difficult time. This is a moment where the church can step in and offer support during a time of crisis.

The “baby blues” are something that most moms can experience for a couple weeks after giving birth. It is a time filled with emotions, hormones, stress, and no sleep. For 10–20 percent of women, these feelings of depression and anxiety do not go away and they suffer from postpartum depression.¹³⁸

In 1993 the journal, *Child Development*, released an article on an experiment involving 100 mothers and their stress levels at one month and four months post birth of their first child. What they found was that mothers with greater support were significantly more positive. Social support helped a mother with her life satisfaction and lessened her depression.¹³⁹

Throughout history, the church has been able to grow because Christians were looking out for those in times of crisis. In *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of*

137. Melinda Denton, 17.

138. “Maternal Health”, Accessed February 1, 2020, <http://www.dph.illinois.gov/topics-services/life-stages-populations/maternal-child-family-health-services/maternal-health/depression>.

139. Keith Crinic A. et al., “Effects of Stress and Social Support on Mothers and Premature and Full-Term Infants” 54 (February 1983): 209-217, accessed August 20, 2019, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1129878?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents.

Christianity in the Roman Empire, Alan Kreider proposes that one of the main reasons that the church grew throughout their early history was because of habitus – reflexive bodily behavior. They had habitual behavior that was distinctive and intriguing to those around them. They were able to “address intractable problems that ordinary people faced in ways that offered hope.”¹⁴⁰ These women need hope in their daily struggles with being a mom. The church has women who can offer that hope for them.

When it comes to speaking to Millennials from the pulpit, a stage, or anywhere that people are trying to draw them in, there are a few things to keep in mind. It was rumored for a while that the attention span of Millennials was now at 8 seconds, just one second shorter than that of a goldfish. Instead, what researchers are finding is that Millennials can have very long attention spans as long as they are interested in the information being given. They have found that what is useful in drawing in and keeping their attention is the use of story and visual stimulation.¹⁴¹

Stetzer observed that emerging generations love the power of story. For this reason, many will choose to read the Gospels over the epistles.¹⁴² He also found that stories connect us with history and with life lessons that people have learned. Millennials love to learn from the stories of those who have gone before them.¹⁴³

140. Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2016), 2.

141. Nadiya Ghausi, “Sorry, Goldfish: People’s Attention Spans Aren’t Shrinking, They’re Evolving”, last modified October 19, 2018, accessed September 15, 2019, <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/321266>.

142. Stetzer, Stanley, and Hayes, *Lost and Found*, 100.

143. Stetzer, Stanley, and Hayes, *Lost and Found*, 133.

Stories are powerful ways to affect change. Aristotle believed that for effective communication there must be three components: logos (the content), ethos (the credibility), and pathos (the emotion of the speech). Jerry Root, director of the Evangelism Initiative at the Billy Graham Center notes that “If I do not have pathos, I cannot move people to action, to doing something. So if you want to move people to act, you have to have the kind of communication that reaches the heart, and it’s almost always through story and the imagination.”¹⁴⁴

Just as Jesus used stories to draw people in, stories could be an answer to drawing in Millennials. If these stories focus on life situations that the emerging generation is facing, they will be especially receptive to hear them. For young moms, this could be a great way to reach out to them in their time of life change; a change that could include stress and crisis while they are searching for answers and support.

144. Jerry Root, personal communication Rick Richardson, July 18, 2018.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

“Reaching Millennial Moms” was a project with three main elements: a preliminary survey, a devotional, and a post-survey.

Project Overview

Millennials, those born between the years 1980-2000 are currently in their 20s and 30s and are at the peak time of starting families. Statistically most Millennial women marry around the age of 27 and have their first child around the age of 27.¹ Are these Millennials raising their new families in the church?

Research shows that 66 percent of Millennials stopped attending church between the ages of 18 and 22. There are those who have come back, but there are still 46 percent of churched Millennials who left the church and have not decided to come back regularly.² Twenty-three percent of the American population now claims to be the religion of “none.” These “nones” are made up of many Millennials. “Nones” are the fastest growing religious identification in the nation.³

1. Tim Elmore, *Generation iY: Our Last Chance to Save Their Future* (Atlanta: Poet Gardner Publishing), 2010, 55.

2. Rick Richardson, *You Found Me: New Research on How Unchurched, Nones, Millennials, and Irreligious Are Surprisingly Open to Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2019), location 658, Kindle.

3. Richardson, *You Found Me*, location 174, Kindle.

Relationships may be the key to helping Millennials discover church, return to church, or see church as something essential in their lives. The majority of unchurched individuals said that they would try church if they were invited by a friend or family member. Thirty-nine percent of unchurched Millennials claim they plan to return to church one day.⁴

Many people come to faith or return to faith when they face a pivotal life moment. A lot of these Millennials are facing or are about to face a major life changing moment as they begin a family. Who they surround themselves with during this time is paramount to their odds of finding faith.⁵

This is why this project is so important. The question that this project seeks to answer is: Can the life phase of new motherhood be a season that the church is able to leverage to encourage Millennials to come into Christian community?

Project One: Millennial Mom Preliminary Survey

The first step of the project was to discover the views of Millennial moms living in Charlotte, NC. Do new moms in Charlotte have similar views on religion as those found in nationwide studies? Do they feel similar levels of stress? Do they see the time of early motherhood as a time of change? These were some of the questions that needed to be answered in Project One as the stage was set for what Millennial moms need and how the church can help.

4. Richardson, *You Found Me*, location 946-1061, Kindle.

5. Thom. S. Rainer and Sam S. Rainer III, *Essential Church: Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), location 1641, Kindle.

An online survey (see Appendix A) was created using Google Forms and distributed on the official Charlotte Moms Facebook page which at the time had 16,000 members. The parameters for those eligible to participate in the survey were the following: must be a woman, must have been born between the years 1980-2000, must live in Charlotte, NC, must have birthed or adopted a child within the past 12 months. Women were asked 12 questions relating to their religion, church involvement, life as a mother, and community support. The survey included fill in the blank, multiple choice, and linear scale questions. There were 126 individuals who completed the survey.

The answers the women gave were linked to their e-mail addresses and a third party, Research Assistant 1, randomly generated an e-mail address to win a \$25 Amazon gift card. Moms had 15 days to fill out the survey in order to be eligible for the prize. After Research Assistant 1 e-mailed the gift card to the winning e-mail address, all e-mail addresses were removed from the answers. A number was assigned to each survey result to assist in organizing information. All information was stored securely in Google Forms. By filling out the survey women gave their consent.

Project Two: The Sisterhood of Motherhood Devotional

In the book, *I Once Was Lost: What Postmodern Skeptics Taught Us About Their Path to Jesus*, authors Don Everts and Dough Schaupp looked at why it was that people living in post-modern America decided to follow Jesus. They discovered that in thousands of stories, the reason that people came to want a relationship with Jesus was through having a relationship of trust with a Christian. Many of these relationships were built on situations where people

bonded together over mutual activities or priorities. The interest in Christianity came from other people taking an interest in what was happening in their lives.⁶

This project was birthed out of the idea that perhaps the time of early motherhood could be a chance for Christian women to earn the trust of those young moms who are outside the church or who are nominally involved in a church. During the first years of being a mom, there is a lot of change going on inside and outside of a woman. There is an opportunity for women to come alongside new moms and support them by bonding over their own journey to and through motherhood.

As shown in chapter three, Millennials love the power of story. Researchers have found that this generation is drawn in by use of story and visual stimulation.⁷ Look through mom blogs and Facebook pages, and anyone can see that young women today would rather get the opinion of other mothers going through similar situations than the opinion of doctors. They value personal story and authenticity, and trust is built through the sharing of similar life situations.

With this in mind, the devotional *The Sisterhood of Motherhood: From Our Momma Hearts To Yours* was created. This is a devotional written by moms and for moms. It is a way for moms both inside and outside the church to connect with Christian women who have experienced the gamut of what it means to be a mom in America.

6. Don Everts and Doug Schaupp, *I Once Was Lost : What Postmodern Skeptics Taught Us About Their Path to Jesus*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2008), 29.

7. Nadiya Ghausi, "Sorry, Goldfish: People's Attention Spans Aren't Shrinking, They're Evolving", last modified October 19, 2018, accessed September 15, 2019, <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/321266>.

To begin the project, a small group of women from Lake Forest Church was selected to help think through which women could contribute to the devotional. This small group compiled a list of over 100 names of women who may be good at writing out their story of motherhood. Recommendations were given over who had compelling stories that would reach different moms. Eventually 50 women were contacted. They each received a personal invitation to write their story about motherhood in hopes of touching a young mom. Of those 50 women, 21 of them were able to complete the assignment and write a short devotional. Some of the women who did not participate were too busy, never responded, did not feel like they were gifted at writing, or they preferred to help with new moms in a different way. Some prompting and prodding was needed for women to turn in their stories in the allotted timeframe.

Twenty-one stories were chosen that showed many different aspects of being a mother. These stories included unplanned pregnancy, miscarriage, praying for a baby for years, infertility, twins, adoption, hard childbirth, easy pregnancy, doubting her ability as a mom, the stress of having hard babies, and longing for something different in her child. Each story also included a Bible verse that spoke to this mom during this time.

The stories were sent to an editor who was able to fix grammatical errors and edit down most of the devotionals to 400 words. Because visuals are important for Millennials, a graphic designer created a beautiful template that would appeal to the senses and help women feel peaceful. The stories were laid out and put in an order that would best move along the story and keep the attention of the reader.

The choosing of the title for the devotional was important. All of the women who sent in their stories were given the chance to voice their opinion. A small list of potential titles was

circulated, and women voted on which title they thought best expressed the reason for the book and would be most inviting for new moms to read. The title that was best received was *The Sisterhood of Motherhood* and close behind was the title *From Our Momma Hearts to Yours*. The creator of the devotional thought that a combination of those two titles would be best. This would show new moms that they are now a part of a special community. They are invited in. It would also show them how personal, vulnerable, and supportive this community can become.

The book was made into both eBook form and print form. Some women prefer holding a print book and some find it easier to read on their phone on the go. Five-hundred print copies were ordered for Lake Forest Church with the plan of giving them out to all ministry partners or visitors when they have a baby. They were also available to purchase for \$5 for people to give to their friends. The eBook was free for anyone to download. Two versions of the eBook were created, one for phones and one for computers.

In order to get the book into many Millennial hands, a posting was placed on the Charlotte Moms and Moms of Huntersville Facebook group pages. Together these pages have over 20,000 moms. The post advertised a free resource for new moms and included a link with the phone version, the computer version, and the post-survey.

Ideally the devotional would be handed out personally to moms. The creator of the project moved to China in the middle of the project and could not be hands-on in the distributing of the devotionals. She had to rely on people and groups she knew back in the United States. She contacted people around the US and China to distribute both forms of the eBook devotional and the post-survey to moms who could benefit from it. It was posted on

MOPS (Moms of Preschoolers) Facebook groups, neighborhood groups, Stoller Strides groups (work-out with other moms with their children), and through personal connections. The creator of the project posted it on her personal Facebook page. Originally the devotional and data were created for Millennial moms with a child less than one year old, but in order to receive more data, the project was opened up to all moms of any age around the world.

Project Three: Post-Survey

Those who read the devotional, were also given a post-survey (see Appendix C) to be filled out upon completing the devotional. The parameters for those eligible to participate in the survey were the following: must be a woman, must have birthed or adopted a child, must have read the devotional. Women were asked 16 questions relating to their religion, church involvement, life as a mother, and community support. They were asked about how the devotional impacted their spirituality and their view of the church and connection with Christian women. The survey included fill in the blank, multiple choice, and linear scale questions.

Their answers were linked to their e-mail address and a third party, Research Assistant 1, randomly generated an e-mail address to win a \$25 Amazon gift card. Moms had 30 days to fill out the survey in order to be eligible for the prize. After Research Assistant 1 e-mailed the gift card to the winning e-mail address, all e-mail addresses were removed from the answers. A number was assigned to each survey result to assist in organizing information. All information was stored securely in Google Forms. By filling out the survey women gave their consent. Sixty-five women submitted the post-survey.

The main objective of the post-survey was to see if reading the devotional altered the women's view of the church and Christian community. Did they feel more connected to Christian women? Did they feel like Christian women could understand them and relate to them? Were they able to connect with God at all during their time of going through the devotional? Was this a tool that women could use to encourage their new mom friends in Christian community?

Conclusions

Through a preliminary survey, much information was gathered about what life is like for new Millennial moms in Charlotte, NC. This will be helpful in discovering the best ways to reach and support these young women. While it was difficult for the creator of the project to personally hand out the devotionals because of her move to China, the devotional was circulated around the world. Many women were excited when they received it through the online version. A post-survey was helpful in gathering information about moms after they read *The Sisterhood of Motherhood*. Comparisons were made to see if reading the devotional had any impact on mothers.

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

“Reaching Millennial Moms” is a project with three main elements: a preliminary survey, a devotional, and a post-survey. The project addresses two primary concerns:

1. Why are Millennials leaving the church?
2. Is there a way that the church can address this?

Preliminary Survey

In order to determine if the life phase of new motherhood can be a season the church is able to leverage to encourage Millennials to come into Christian community, a preliminary survey was created (see Appendix A). To be eligible for the survey, women must have been born between the years 1980-2000, live in Charlotte, NC, and have had a child or adopted a child within the past 12 months. There were 126 individuals who completed the online survey.

A point of interest in the survey was the religious differences. Specifically, special attention was given to the difference between those women who are Christian and those who claim the religion “none”. Of the 126 women who took the survey, 96 (76.2 percent) of them identified as Christian and 14 (11.1 percent) of them identified as “none”. Figure 1 shows the breakdown in religion. There were also women who identified as Atheist, Agnostic, and Jewish. A couple women preferred not to answer. Five women wrote in the answer Catholic.

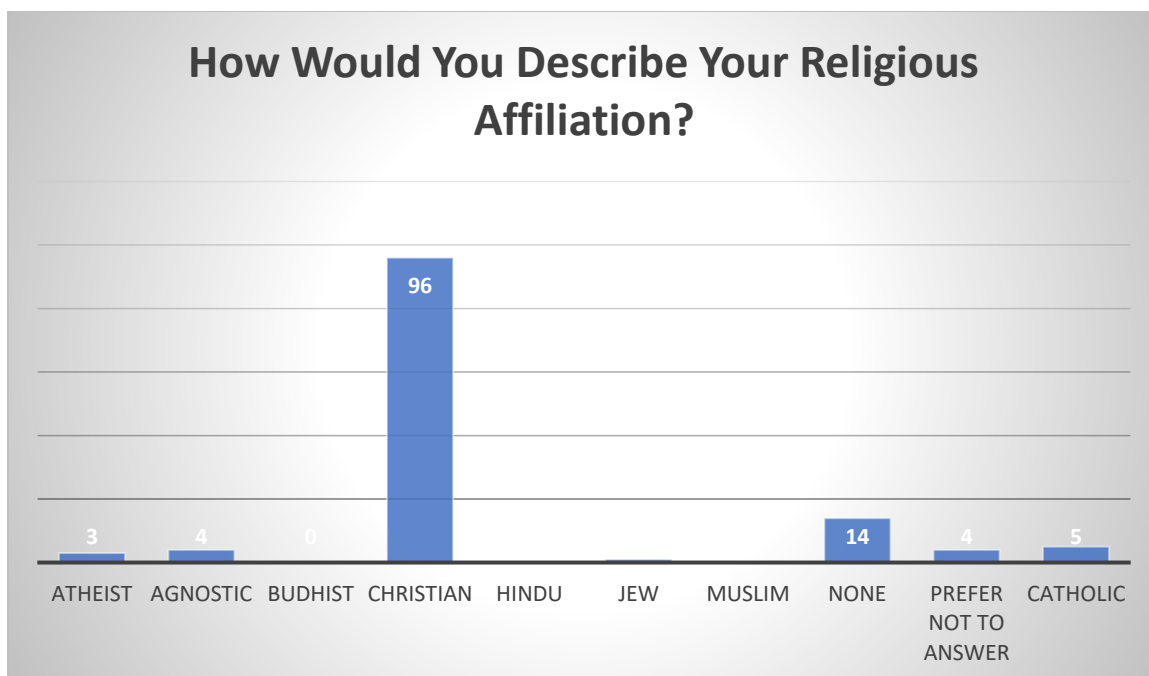


Figure 1. Preliminary Survey: How would you describe your religious affiliation?

The religious views of these women are slightly different than that of the state of North Carolina. In North Carolina the number of those claiming “none” rose from 12 percent in 2007 to 20 percent in 2014, and they continue to rise. Much of this jump is due to Millennials and not to the older generations. In an article in the *Charlotte Observer*, “Religiously Unaffiliated on the Rise in the South and Across the U.S.”, Tim Funk lays out ideas for why Charlotte’s religious landscape is changing. He believes that part of it is the influx of people from other parts of the country where Christianity isn’t the norm. He sees people moving to the Bible belt without any religious affiliation.¹

1. Tim Funk, “Religiously Unaffiliated on the Rise in the South and across the U.S”, last modified July 18, 2015, accessed January 31, 2020, <https://www.charlotteobserver.com/living/religion/article27695647.html#storylink=cpy>.

Bill Leonard, professor of church history and former dean of the divinity school at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem blames “the changing sociology of Sunday.” In North Carolina families are spending their Sundays at soccer games, with aging family members, or out in nature at the beach or mountains.²

In the New Mom Preliminary Survey, the percentage of “nones” was slightly different than the North Carolina average. The women who claimed Agnostic, Atheist, and “none” totaled 16.7 percent with another 3.2 percent who preferred not to answer. This is a little less than the North Carolina average. Perhaps the demographics were slightly skewed to resemble a more Christian city because of the network of the creator of the survey. The survey was posted on Facebook groups which were not necessarily Christian, but it was also posted on Facebook groups with a Christian affiliation. The creator of the survey also asked people she knew to help distribute the survey and those women may have been more likely to have Christian acquaintances.

There was interest to see differences in responses depending on individuals’ Christian church attendance. As figure 2 illustrates, only 34.1 percent of respondents “Attend church regularly.” One quarter of the respondents previously attended a Christian church but no longer do. Of respondents, 13.5 percent have attended a Christian church, but not regularly, and 7.1 percent of the women have never attended a Christian church.

2. “Religiously Unaffiliated on the Rise in the South and across the U.S.”.

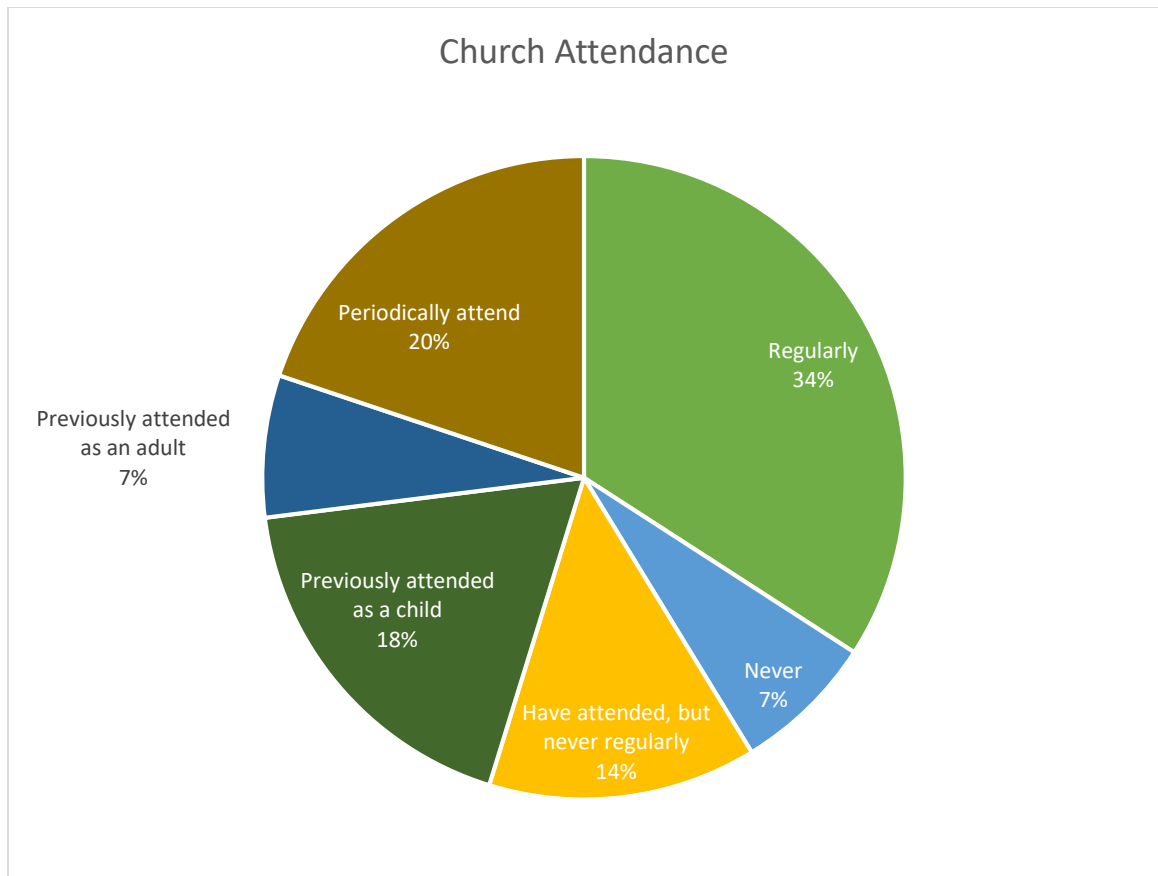


Figure 2. Preliminary Survey: How would you describe your Christian church attendance?

One concern the creator of the survey had was the definition of what it means to attend a Christian church regularly. Barna Research Group conducted a seven year study of over 76,505 people to look at the religiosity of cities across America. They defined “attending a church regularly,” or “active churchgoers,” as having attended church in the past seven days, not including a special event like a wedding or a funeral.³ The creator of the survey should have defined for her participants what it meant to “attend church regularly.” However, with no

3. “Church Attendance Trends Around the Country”, last modified May 26, 2017, accessed January 31, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/church-attendance-trends-around-country/>.

specific definition and only the women's own personal definition of "regularly," 34.1 percent claim that they do attend church regularly.

When Barna conducted their seven-year study, ending in 2017, they found that Charlotte was in the top 20 of cities with people who claim to attend church regularly. In fact, Charlotte came in at number 13 with 52 percent of respondents being active churchgoers. Barna found the national average of active churchgoers to be 38 percent.⁴ The research done in this Millennial mom study revealed a religious landscape more like the national average than the city average in Charlotte. While a greater than average number of these women claimed to be Christian, a lesser than average number claimed to actually attend church regularly.

A large part of the survey was centered on the change that occurs when a woman has a child. The following two graphs show the perceived amount of overall change that happens to a woman. The first graph shows how women answered the question, "How much has your life changed since having a baby?" A 5-point linear scale was created where women could choose between "No change" (1) to "Complete change" (5). The resulting bar graph (figure 3) shows the following:

4. "Church Attendance Trends Around the Country".

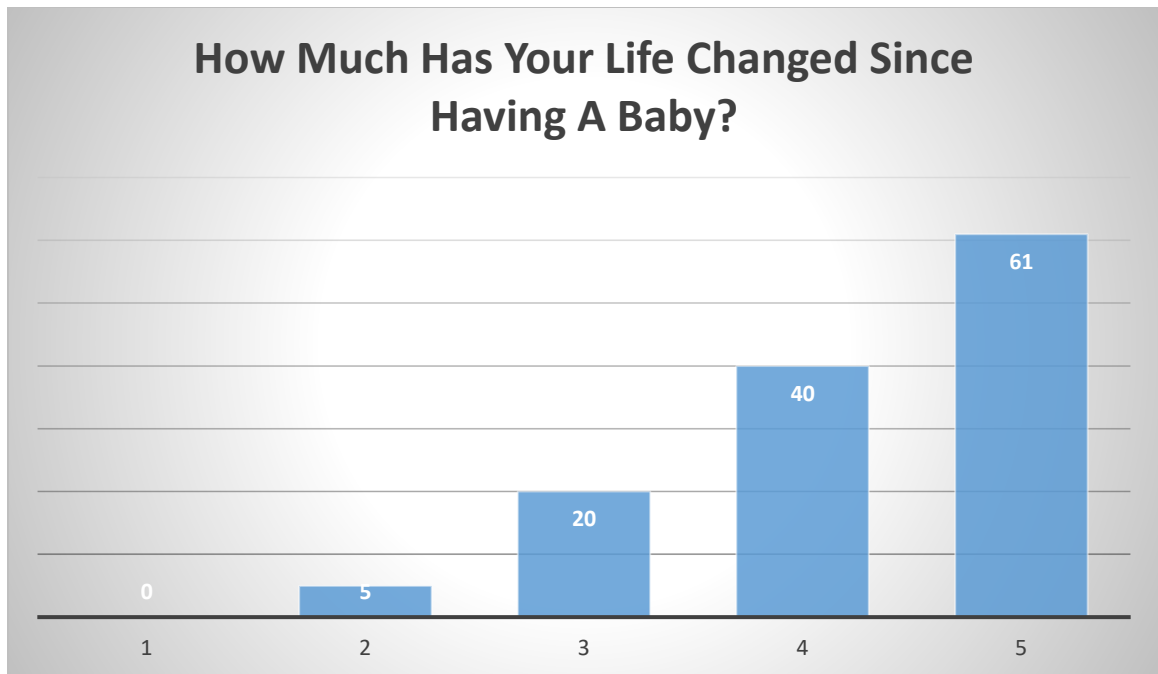


Figure 3. Preliminary Survey: How much has your life changed since having a baby?

Almost 50 percent of the women responded that life had completely changed. More than four out of five women claimed that a significant change had occurred. Not one mom claimed that there was no change.

The second graph shows how women answered the question, “What is the condition of your life now, compared to before having children?” A 5-point linear scale was created where women could choose between 1 (Significantly easier) to 5 (Significantly more difficult). The resulting bar graph (figure 4) shows the following:

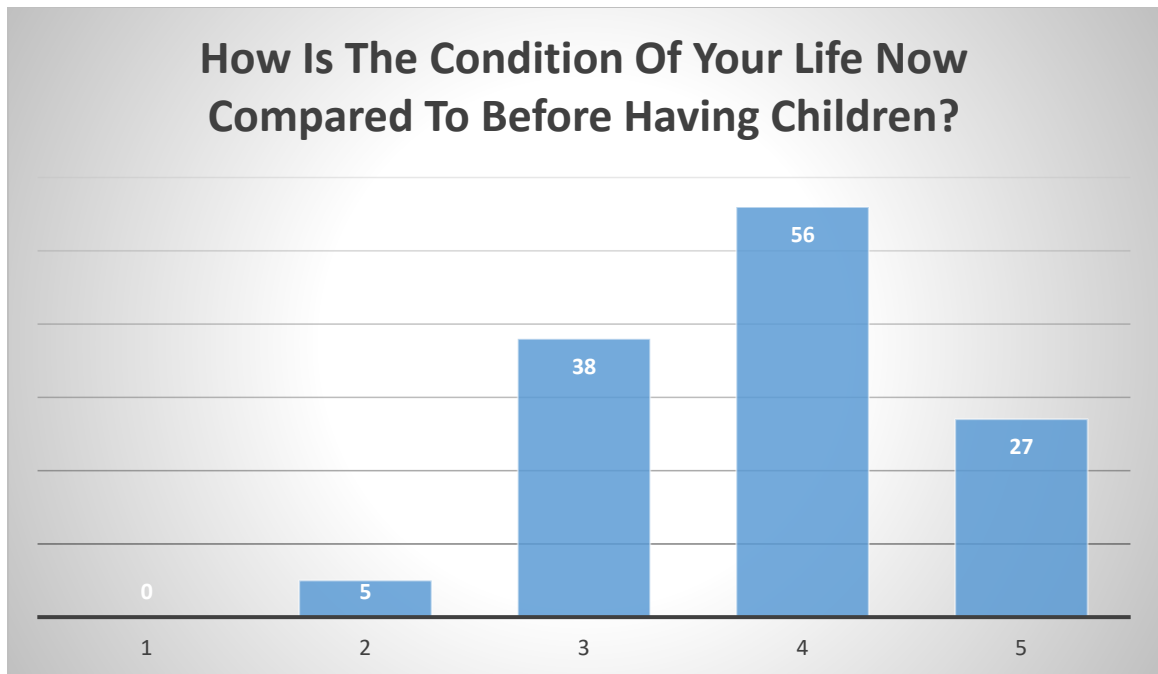


Figure 4. Preliminary Survey: What is the condition of your life now, compared to before having children?

Most women responded that life is harder now than it was before having a child.

Almost 25 percent claimed that it is significantly harder. Not one person claimed that life after having a child is significantly easier.

Was there a difference between the “nones” and Christians concerning changes that come from having a baby? According to the previous two questions from figures 3 and 4, there was no noticeable difference between “nones” and Christians. For figure 3, Christian women averaged 4.19 and “nones” averaged 4.29. Both sets of women responded that their lives have significantly changed since having a child. For figure 4, Christian women averaged 3.78 and “nones” averaged 3.64. Both sets of women were slightly under the impression that the significant change that had occurred had brought about more difficulties.

What were some of the biggest changes and difficulties that these women were dealing with? Specific factors were presented in the survey and women chose from five options with the point scale: “significantly improved” (1), “Somewhat improved” (2), “Stayed the same” (3), “Somewhat declined” (4), “Significantly declined” (5). Figure 5 shows the various factors that were presented and how women rated their experiences.

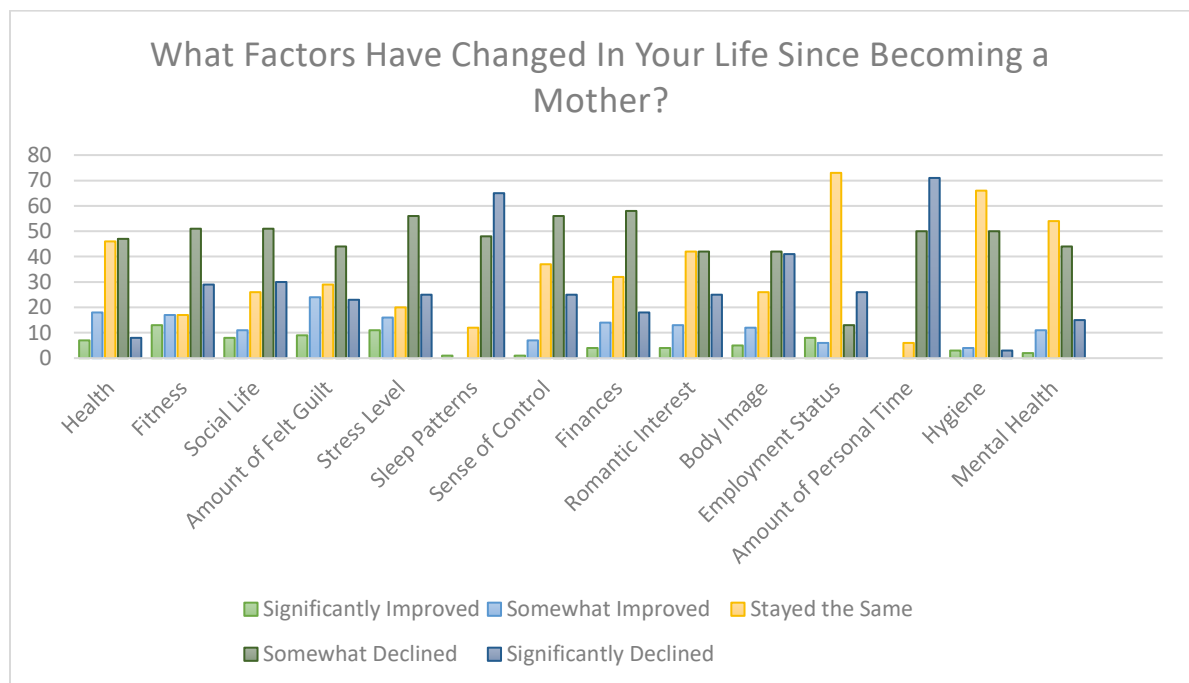


Figure 5. Preliminary Survey: What factors have changed in your life since becoming a mother?

The mode for the majority of the factors was “Somewhat declined.” Employment status, hygiene, and mental health had a mode of “Stayed the same.” The two factors that saw the most decline were sleep patterns and amount of personal time. Not one factor showed a mode of either “Significantly improved” or “Somewhat improved.” It should be noted that the wording for the factors, “Amount of felt guilt” and “Stress level” may have been confusing.

Women may not have understood which way to answer if they felt their levels of guilt and stress were increasing.

A couple questions on the survey centered on community with other moms. The research for chapter three in this thesis convinced the author that community support is vital for women as they go through the first years of having a child. She was curious to know how much community and support these women believe they have. Figure 6 shows the amount of support that these moms believe they have from other moms locally in Charlotte. This would not include support from friends or family who do not live locally in Charlotte. Women were asked “How much support do you feel you have from other moms in Charlotte?” They answered on a five-point scale ranging from “No support” (1) to “Extremely high level of support” (5). The answers are shown in figure 6 below.

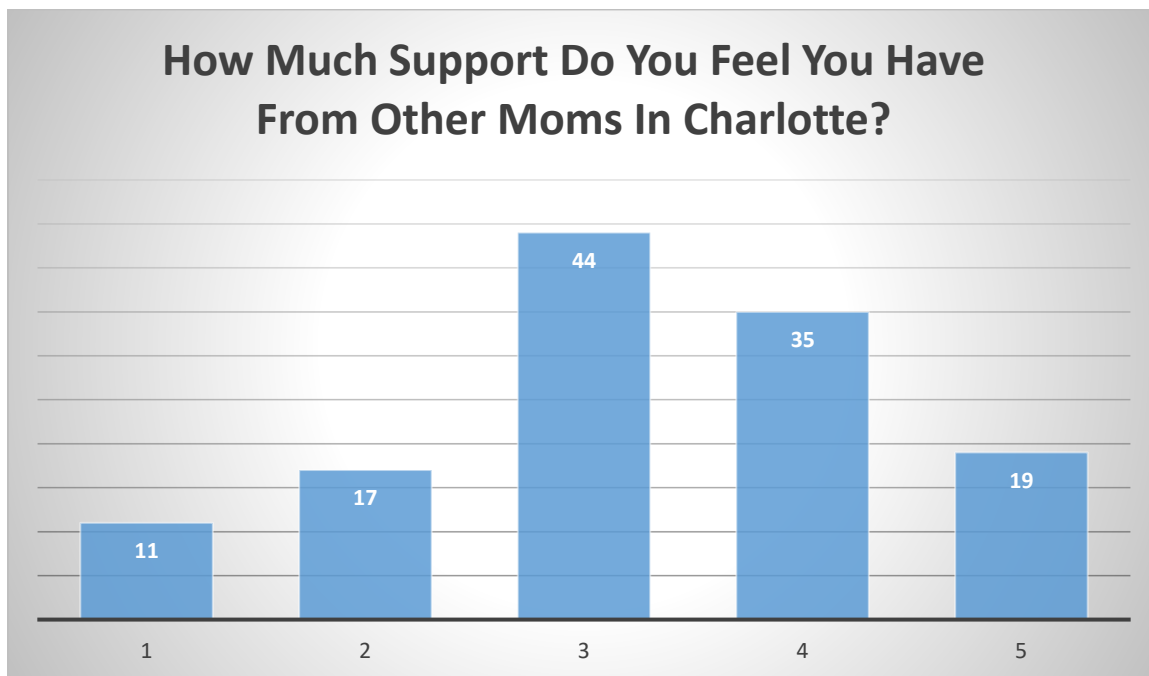


Figure 6. Preliminary Survey: How much support do you feel you have from other moms in Charlotte?

Results were similar between Christian moms (average 3.3) and “nones” (average 3.0) with Christian moms feeling slightly more support.

The author of this thesis was also curious to see if women would want more local friends for support and community. The question was asked, “How would you describe your satisfaction with your relationships with other moms in Charlotte?” Women could choose from the following four options: “Extremely satisfied – I don’t need to find more mom friends,” “Satisfied – I have mom friends but it could be nice to find more mom friends,” “Somewhat satisfied – While I do have some mom friends, I feel like I need more mom friends,” “Not satisfied – I am desperate to find connections with other moms.” The results are below in figure 7.

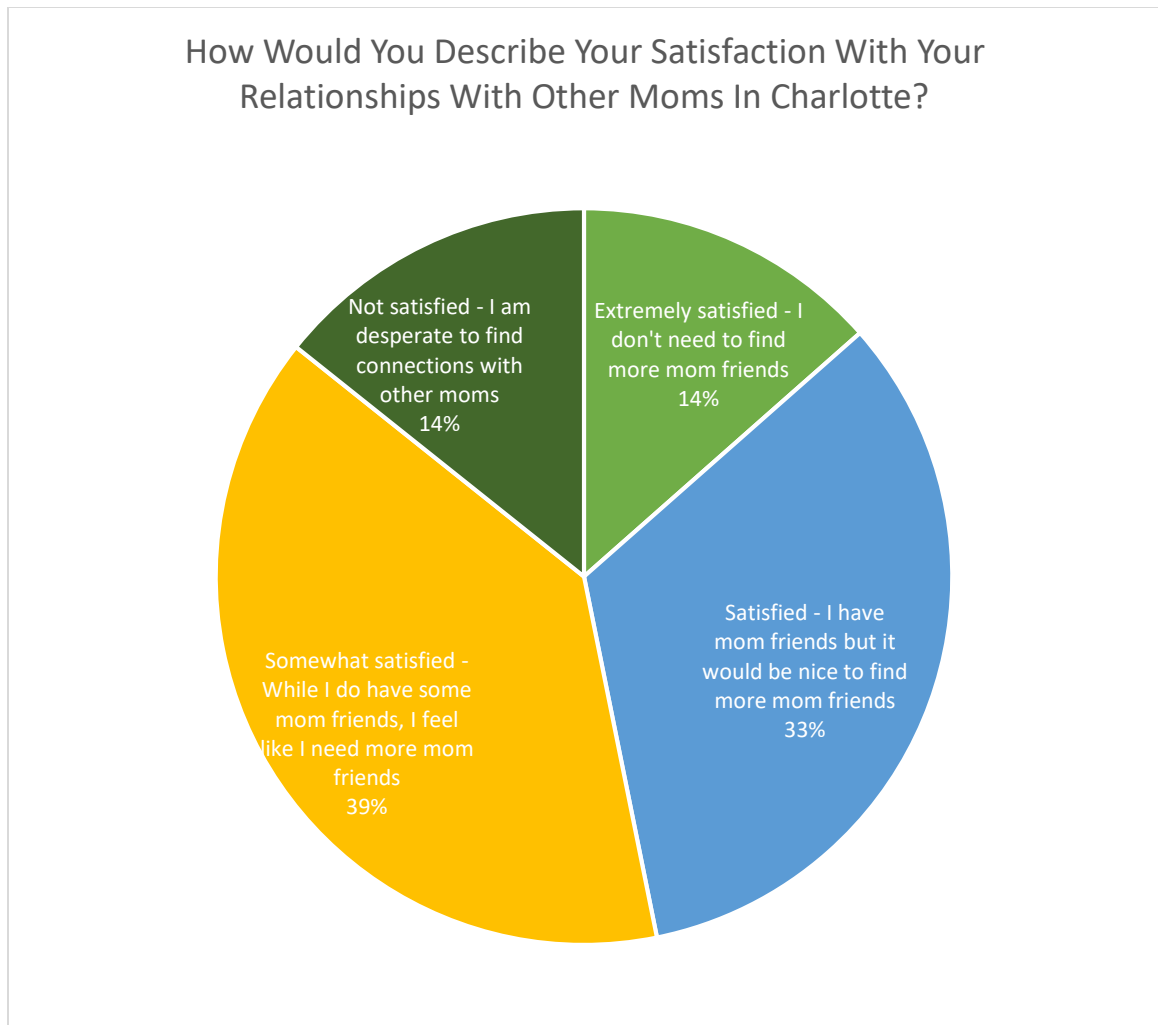


Figure 7. Preliminary Survey: How would you describe your satisfaction with your relationships with other moms in Charlotte?

The majority of the women were somewhat satisfied or satisfied but still want more friends. The somewhat satisfied (38.9 percent) felt like they do need more mom friends and the satisfied felt like it would be nice to find more mom friends. Only 13.5 percent of the women were extremely satisfied and do not feel the need to find more mom friends. Sadly, 14.3 percent of the women were not satisfied, and they are desperate to find connections with other moms. That means 86.5 percent of these moms are looking for moms to connect with.

Of great interest in this study was Millennials' perception of the church. Do new Millennial moms find the church to be relevant? When Rainer and Rainer did their research on Millennials, they discovered that the only way people will continue to go to church or will start going to church is if they find it essential to their lives.⁵

Women were asked, "How relevant is the Christian church to your role as a mother?" They were to answer on a five-point scale, from "Not relevant at all" (1) to "Extremely relevant" (5). The results are below in figure 8.

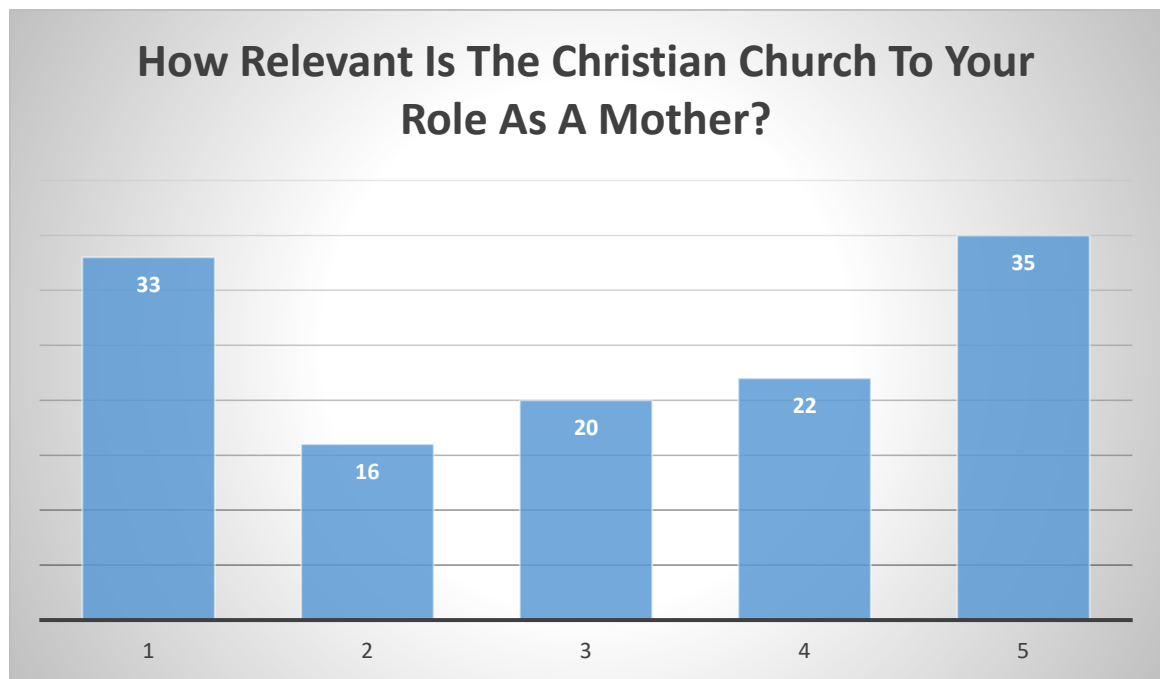


Figure 8. Preliminary Survey: How relevant is the Christian church to your role as a mother?

The majority of women were split between finding the church extremely relevant to their role as a mother and finding the church not relevant at all in their role as a mother. How

5. Thom. S. Rainer and Sam S. Rainer III, *Essential Church: Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), location 171-181, Kindle.

do these results look when taking into account their claimed religion? Figure 9 below shows the results of those who identified as Christian.

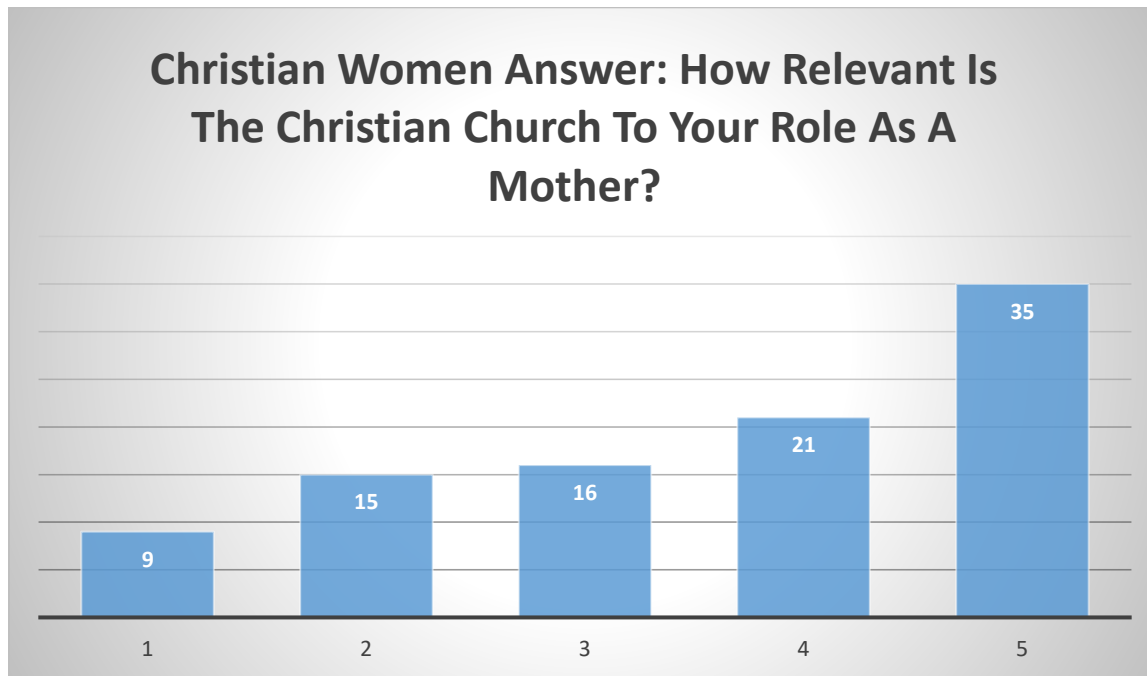


Figure 9. Preliminary Survey: How relevant is the Christian church to your role as a mother? Answers of those who identified as Christian.

Over one-third of Christian women viewed the church to be extremely relevant. The majority of Christian mothers said they find it relevant by answering with a 4 or a 5.

If this category is dissected even farther, one can look at those Christians who claimed to attend a church regularly. Of these women, only one person believes the church is not relevant at all, one person slightly believes it is not relevant, two people are indifferent, nine people think it is slightly relevant, and 30 people believe it is extremely relevant. This would reinforce what Rainer found about active churchgoers. These moms will continue to be active in church when they find that it is relevant and essential to their lives.

On the other side, of those who claimed “none” as their religion, 12 out of 13 of them believe that the church is not relevant at all to their role as a mother. Only one person was indifferent in their belief in the relevance of the church. Of the four moms who claimed Agnostic, three said the church was not relevant at all and one said the church was slightly not relevant. Of the three atheist mothers, all three said the church was not relevant at all. Of the four women who preferred not to answer with their religious affiliation, all four believed the church is not relevant at all. Figure 10 shows the contrast in their beliefs about the relevance of the church between those who claim Christian and the group of those who claim “none”, atheist, agnostic, or prefer not to answer.

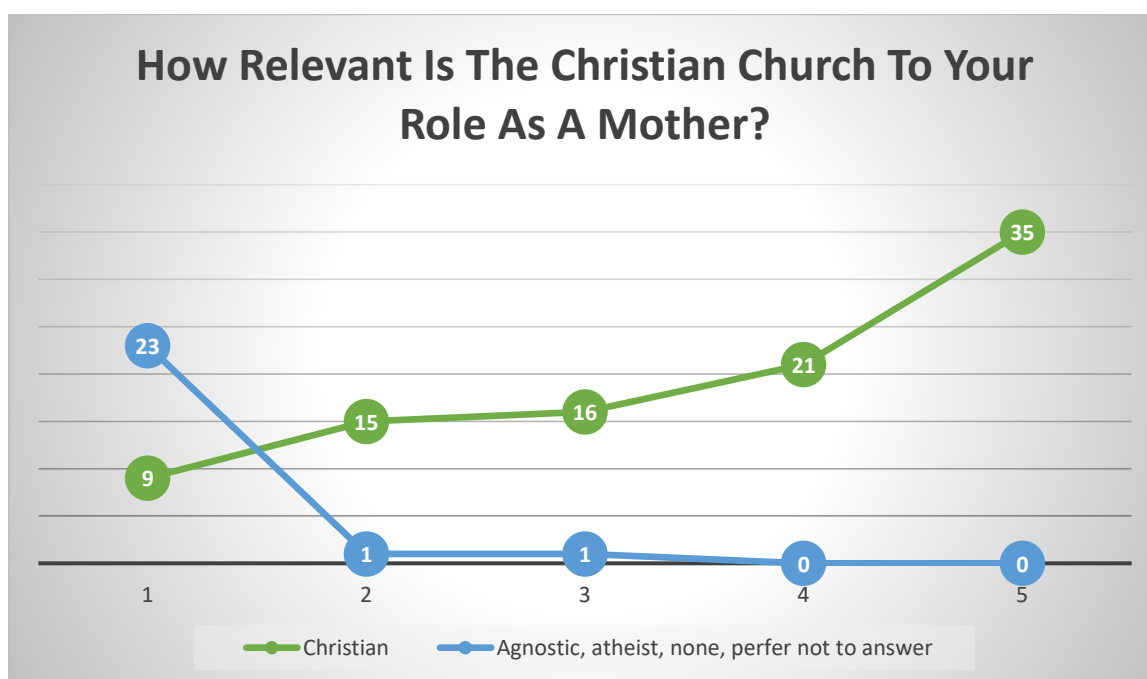


Figure 10. Preliminary Survey: How relevant is the Christian church to your role as a mother? Christian vs. atheist, agnostic, “none”, and prefer not to answer

The next question in the survey took it a step farther to ask about how the church was actually being relevant to the new mother. Women were asked, “How much do you think the

Christian church offers of value to young moms?” They were to answer on a 5-point scale from “Doesn’t offer anything” (1) to “Offers an extremely high amount” (5). Figure 11 shows the responses.

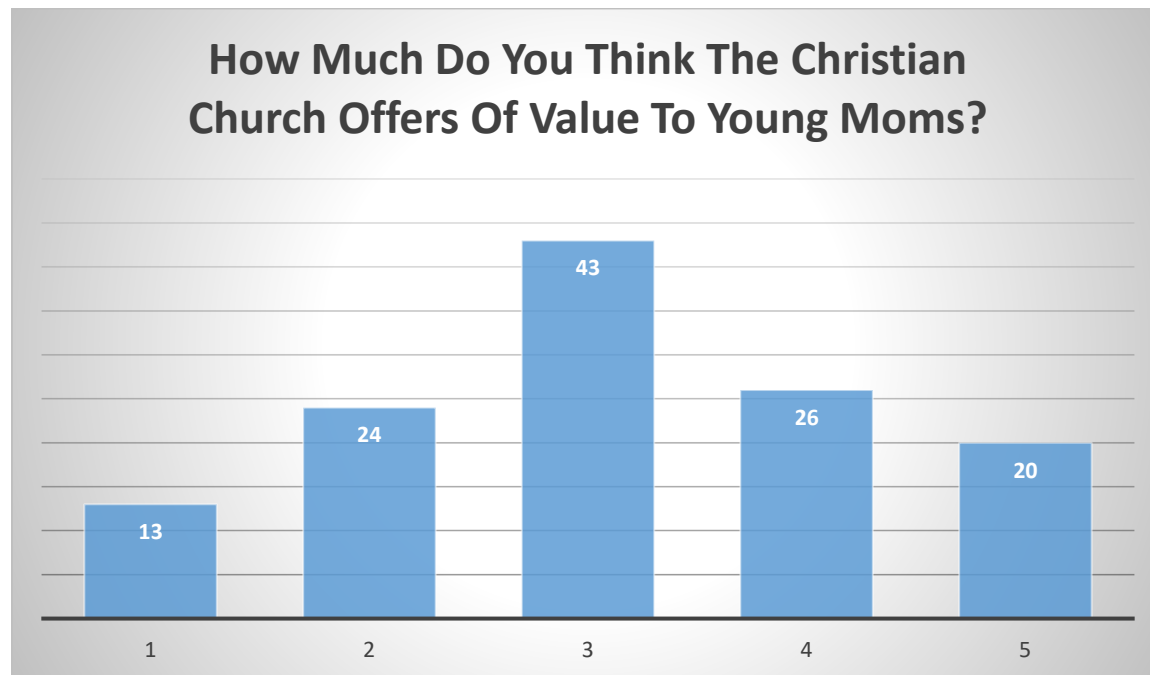


Figure 11. Preliminary Survey: How much do you think the Christian church offers of value to young moms?

The majority of moms were not extreme in their views, unlike with the question concerning relevance. They were in the middle and almost neutral. Overall, they did not really see the church offering them opportunities that could help them as a young mom. They were not finding valuable offerings.

Is there a difference of opinion with this question when it comes to Christian moms and to those who identify with the religion “none”? There is a difference. The mode answer was three for Christian moms with an average of 3.46. Figure 12 below shows the results.

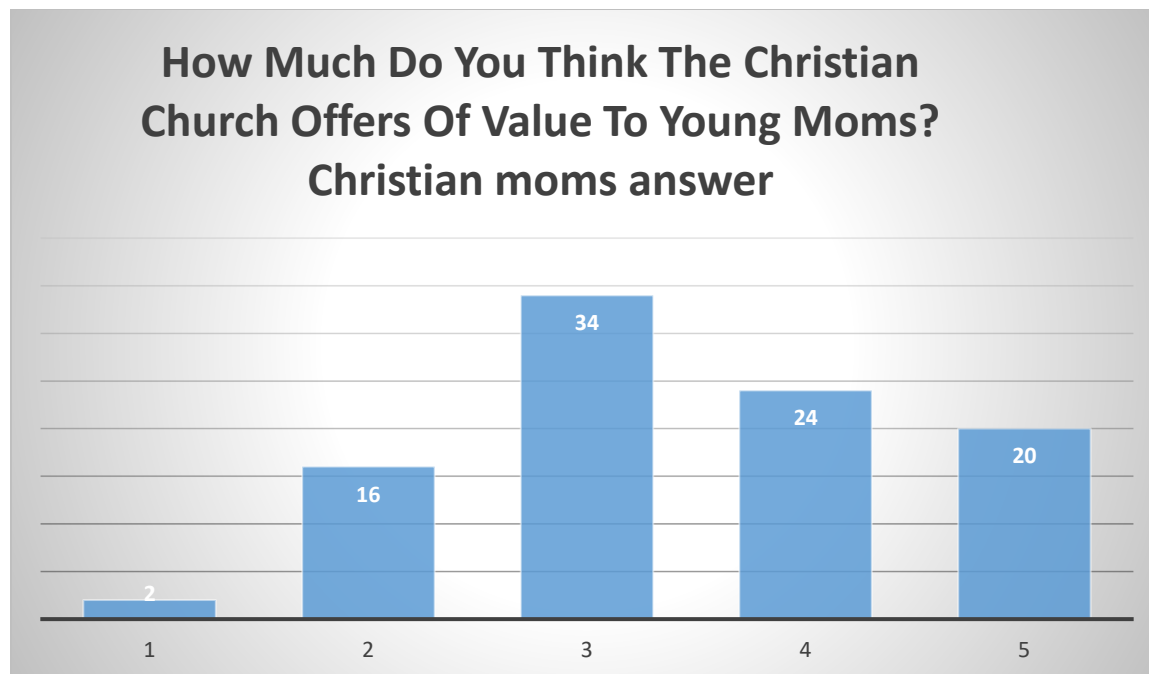


Figure 12. Preliminary Survey: How much do you think the Christian church offers of value to young moms? Christian moms answer

For those who identified as “none”, it is pretty obvious that they did not believe that the church offers much of value to a young mom. Figure 13 below shows the results.

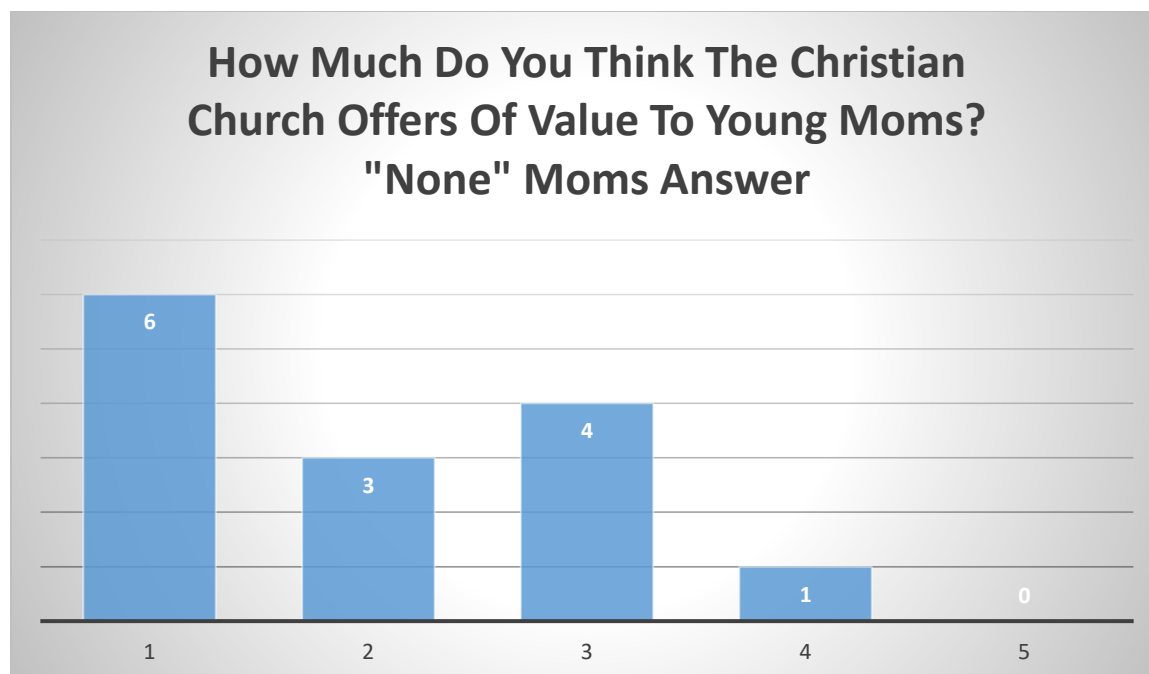


Figure 13. Preliminary Survey: How much do you think the Christian church offers of value to young moms? "None" moms answer

The "none" mothers had a mode of 1 and an average of 2. Not one of them believed the church offers an extremely high amount of value to young moms.

This could be an area of further growth and exploration. Both sets of mothers did not see the church helping them in areas that they find valuable.

One statistic that is interesting, is the statistical difference for Christian mothers in their views of the relevance of the church versus what the church is offering of value. Figure 14 compares these two responses from new moms.

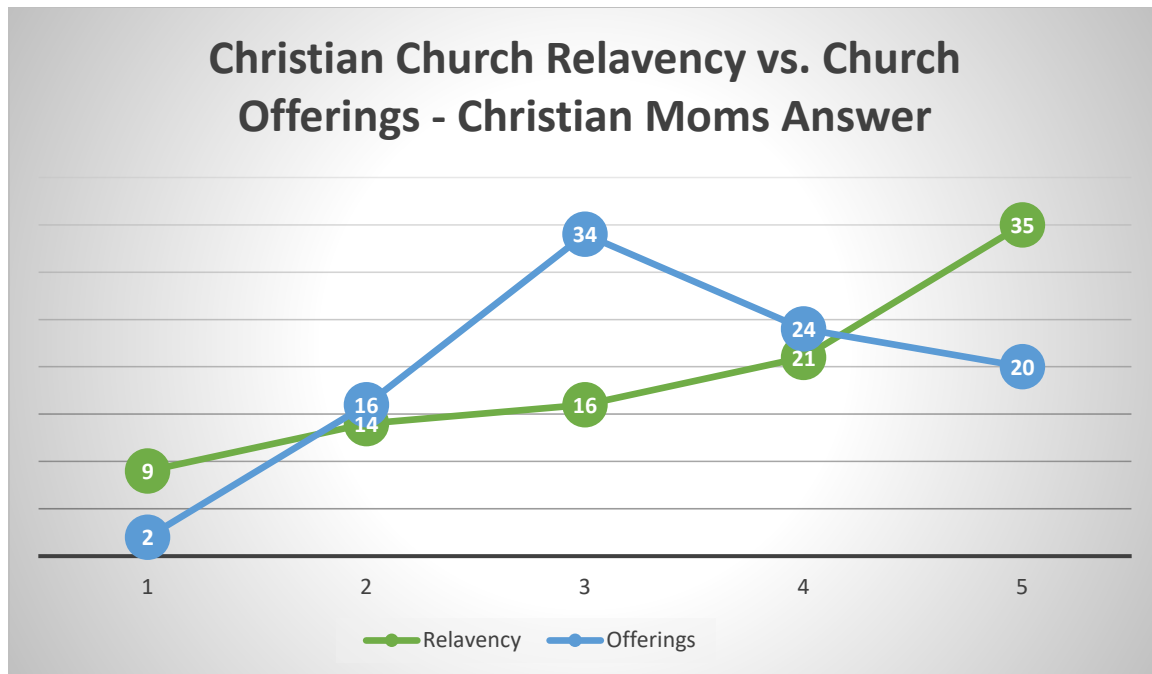


Figure 14. Preliminary Survey: How relevant is the Christian church to your role a mother? vs. How much do you think the Christian church offers of value to young moms? Christian moms answer

While Christian moms believed that the church is valuable to them, they were not finding places where the church is reaching out and offering to help them or invite them in.

The open-ended question was asked “What could a local Christian church do that you would find valuable as a new mother?” A few women preferred not to answer or said that they did not know what the church could do. The answers that showed up the most concerned issues of support and groups for new moms.

With the majority of these women actively seeking or open to finding new mom relationships and connections, how well did they believe that women in the church could relate to them? The question was asked, “How well do you think moms in the Christian church can relate to you personally?” Women answered on a 5-point scale from “Not relate to me at all”

(1) to “Extremely relate to me” (5). The mode answer was 3 with the average being 3.1. On average, new Millennial moms believe that women in the church can barely relate to them.

For those women who attend church regularly, they do believe that moms in the church can relate to them personally. They gave an average of 4.12; 17 out of 43 of them said “They can extremely relate to me.”

What about new moms who are outside the church? For those women who have never attended church and those who have attended but not regularly, they do not believe that women in the church can relate to them personally. Figure 15 below shows their combined results.

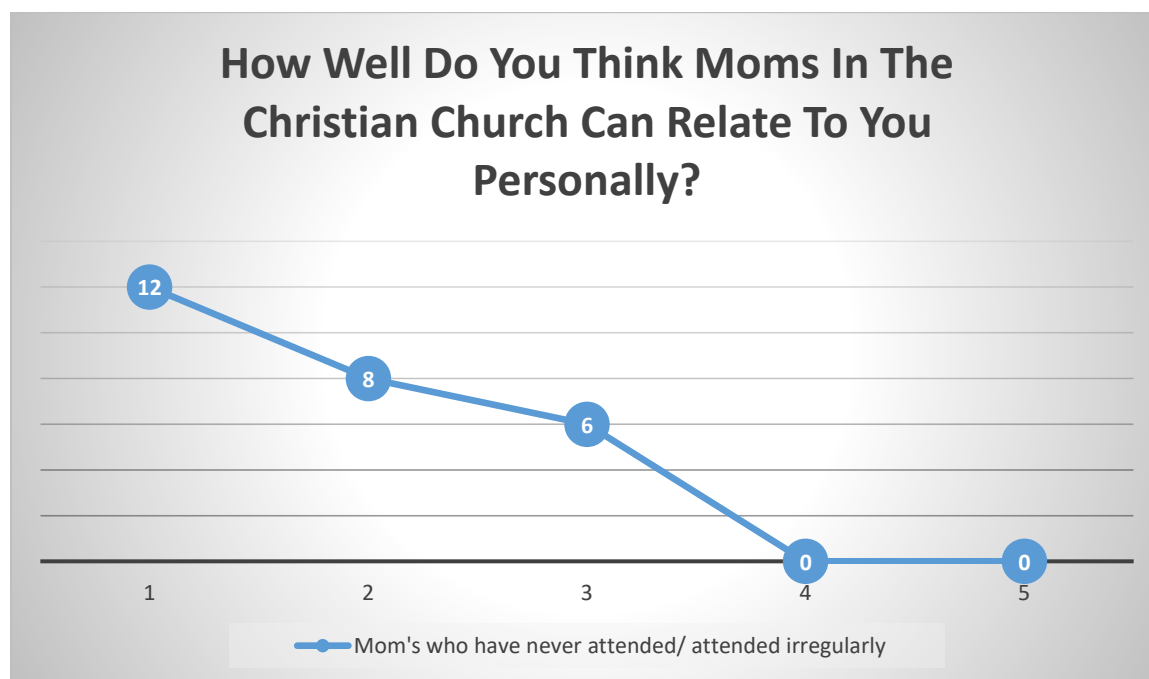


Figure 15. Preliminary Survey: How well do you think moms in the Christian church can relate to you personally? Those moms who have never attended and those moms who have attended but not regularly.

Nearly half of the women answered the question with a 1. They answered that they believe women in the church cannot relate to them at all. Not one of them gave an answer higher than a 3. Not one woman gave a positive response.

When it came to women who had previously attended church, they were slightly more positive, with an average score of 2.57, but they still did not have one woman who gave the answer of 5.

For whatever reason, those who do not attend church regularly in this group, do not believe women in the church can relate to them personally.

It is clear from the new mom preliminary survey that moms in Charlotte are struggling. Their lives have changed since having a child and they are looking for support and community to help them through this time. Many of them do not see the church filling this gap or helping them connect to other moms to learn about what life as a new mom could look like.

The Project: *The Sisterhood of Motherhood*

In order to support and reach out to moms, the devotional book *The Sisterhood of Motherhood: From Our Momma Hearts to Yours* was created (See Appendix B). It included 21 women from Lake Forest Church pouring out their hearts about their joys and struggles with motherhood. Careful consideration was given for every aspect of the devotional from the layout and design to the content of the words on the pages.

The book was published into softback books, but for this project the book was given out in two eBook forms, one formatted for computers and one formatted for phones.

Post-Survey

After reading the devotional, women were asked to submit a short survey of 16 questions. Initially the survey was intended for Millennial moms living in the Charlotte, NC area who had birthed or adopted a child in the past 12 months. With the creator having moved to China, however, the survey needed to expand to include all moms regardless of age or location.

Sixty-five women submitted post-survey results. Of these, 72 percent were Millennials (born between 1980-2000), 25 percent were generation X (born between 1965-1979), and three percent were Baby Boomers (born between 1946-1964). As for the age of their youngest child: 15 percent of them had a child less than one year old, 63 percent had a child 1-5 years old, 12 percent had a child 6-10 years old, one percent had a child 11-14 years old, and seven percent had a child 15 years or older. Half of them lived in Charlotte (32 people) and the other half lived elsewhere (33 people).

Religiously, the make-up was relatively similar to the preliminary survey. In the post-survey, 83 percent claimed to attend a Christian church regularly. Again, a better definition to what “regularly” means would have been helpful. For the other 17 percent of respondents, 10 percent periodically attended a Christian church, five percent previously attended a church but do not anymore, and one person has never attended a Christian church. The majority of those surveyed claimed to be a Christian. There were less participants who identified as “none”, atheist, or agnostic compared with the preliminary survey.

The biggest goal of the project was to see if the devotional is a tool that can be used for women to feel connected with other women in the church. The preliminary survey showed that Millennial moms outside of the church do not believe that women in the church can relate

to them. Perhaps if they read stories of motherhood from Christian women, they could find that they do have something in common. This can be a place for Christian women to begin a relationship or a conversation.

With the preliminary survey showing how hard life is for new moms, one goal of the devotional was to encourage moms. The post-survey question was asked, “How much did reading *The Sisterhood of Motherhood* encourage you as a mother?” They were to answer on a 5-point scale, from Not encouraging (1) to Very encouraging (5). Figure 16 shows the results.

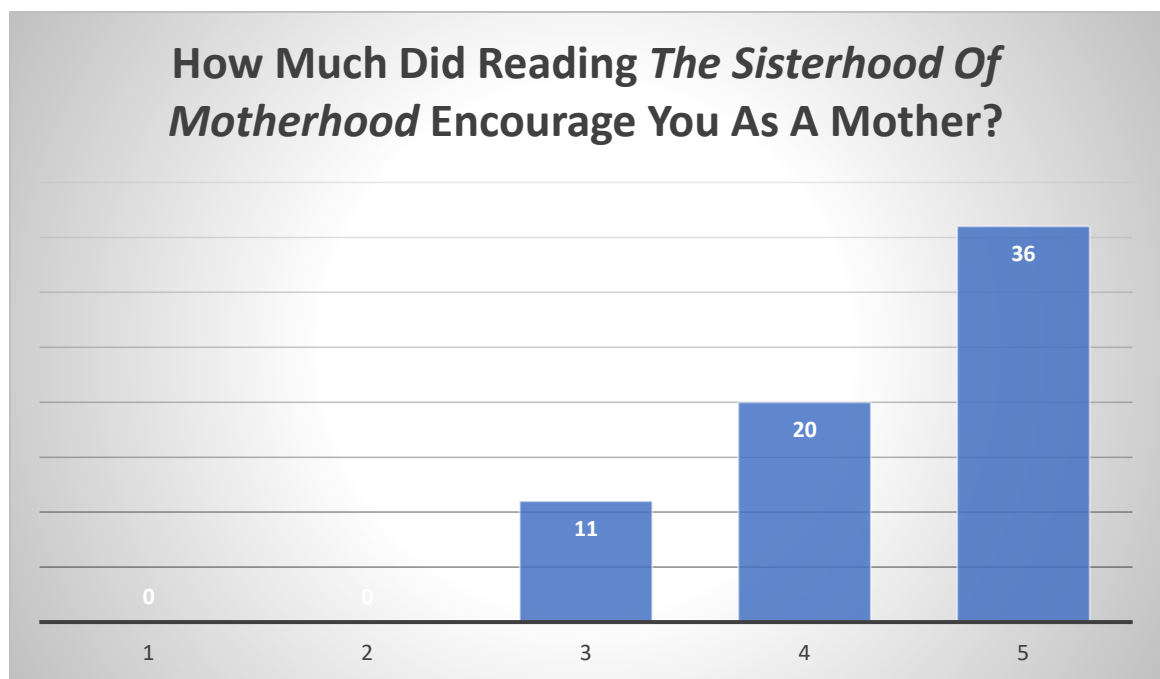


Figure 16. Post Survey: How much did reading *The Sisterhood of Motherhood* encourage you as a mother?

The majority of women felt very encouraged by the stories in the devotional with over 55 percent of them marking a top 5. Not one person gave below a three. It is wonderful to see that moms can feel encouraged during the hardships of mothering. The results were similar when looking specifically at Millennial moms. Their answers ranged from a 3-5 with the

majority being a 5 and the average being a 4.47. If the research and the preliminary survey are true, these women need encouragement and this devotional was able to bring that to them.

The next question on the survey dealt with the larger issue of women not feeling like they can connect with women in the church. The question was asked, “How much did you connect with the women and their stories in *The Sisterhood of Motherhood*?” They were to answer on a 5-point scale, from No connection (1) to Extreme connection (5). Of the 65 women who completed the survey, not one put the answer of 1. Only one of them put the answer of 2. Over 81 percent of the women gave the positive answer of a 4 or a 5. Figure 17 shows how Millennials felt that they connected with the women and their stories.

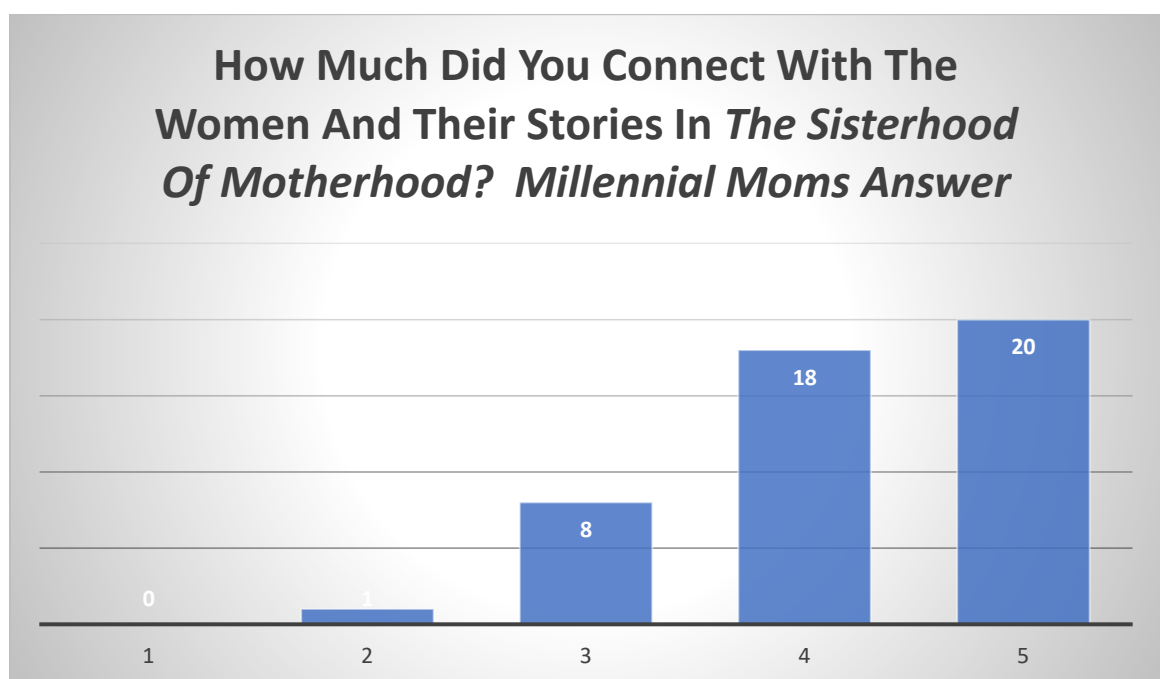


Figure 17. Post Survey: How much did you connect with the women and their stories in *The Sisterhood of Motherhood*? Millennial moms answer

These Millennial moms very positively connected with the Christian women and their stories of motherhood. They were given a chance to write in the specific woman or story that

connected with them and many women connected with many different stories. One mom wrote, “Loved the story about loneliness in those first few months, that was a hurdle to overcome when I was a first-time mom. Extreme joy mixed with extreme loneliness too. Great encouragement!” Women commented on connecting over stories of twins, miscarriage, unplanned pregnancy, feeling judged, feeling like they aren’t good enough, feeling a loss of control, being tired, finding meaningful friendships, and other themes throughout the stories.

When asked if they would want to spend time with the authors of the stories, 60 women said “Yes” and only 5 women said “No.” Interestingly, when looking at Millennials, only 1 woman said “No” and 44 women said “Yes.” These women are open to spending time with these Christian ladies. For those women who live in Charlotte, NC that is something that they could do since the authors live locally.

In the preliminary survey, women were asked “How well do you think moms in the Christian church can relate to you personally?” Women answered on a 5-point scale from “Not relate to me at all (1)” to “Extremely relate to me (5).” In the preliminary survey the average for all women was 3.1. Women barely thought that those in the church could relate to them. It was higher with 4.12 for those who attend church regularly. For those who have never attended church, or who attend but not regularly, they did not have a single answer greater than a 3 and the majority of them answered 1. Even among those who had previously attended church, they only averaged a slightly higher 2.57.

After reading the devotional, how well did the moms think women in the church could relate to them? Overall the average moved from a 3.1 to a 4.07 and the mode moved up from a 3 to a 4. Very positively, 80 percent of the women gave a 4 or a 5.

One hope of the project was specifically for those outside the church to have a way to build Christian community. Did the devotional change their view of women in the church? Among those who have never been to church, periodically attend church, or previously attended church, their scores went up to an average of 3 (five women fit in this category). Interestingly, not one person in the whole survey gave an answer of 1, while that was the leading answer among Millennials outside the church in the preliminary survey. Among those outside the church, there were also those who gave an answer of 4, while in the preliminary survey the highest answer was a 3. Even though the sampling size of these results may not show conclusive evidence that the devotional helps moms have a better view of women in the church, it shows that this is an area worth exploring.

In both surveys, women were asked “How relevant is the Christian church to your role as a mother?” They were to answer on a 5-point scale, from “Not relevant at all” (1) to “Extremely relevant” (5). On the preliminary survey, women averaged just over a 3. After the women read the devotional, they averaged a 4.27. Could it be that reading stories of motherhood from Christian ladies in the church helped women to see that the church has some relevancy and can speak to their real life? Whether that was from reading the devotional or not, these women believe that the church is relevant to their role as a mother.

Like in the preliminary survey, women were asked “How much do you think the Christian church offers of value to young moms?” They were to answer on a 5-point scale from

“Doesn’t offer anything” (1) to “Offers an extremely high amount” (5). Millennials living in Charlotte averaged 3.83 on the post-survey. The average in the preliminary survey among Millennial moms in Charlotte was 3.13 and the average among Christian Millennial moms living in Charlotte was 3.46. Those Charlotte Millennial moms who read the devotional believe that the church is doing more to offer something of value to young moms.

There is still a gap which remains to be addressed. Women believe that the church is relevant to their role as a mother much more than they believe that the church is offering something of value to young moms. Ideas for this discrepancy will be addressed later.

The devotional was not an outright book in how to parent as a Christian or how to grow in faith. Instead, stories of faith were woven throughout. Each story had a Bible verse that a mom could cling on to. The question was raised, “How much impact did *The Sisterhood of Motherhood* have on you spiritually?” Women were to answer on a 5-point scale from “No impact” (1) to “High impact” (5). The average among all women was 3.72 with a mode of 4. Among specifically Millennials the results were almost identical.

The last question on the post survey was, “How likely are you to give *The Sisterhood of Motherhood* to a new mom?” Women were to answer on a five-point scale from “Extremely unlikely” (1) to “Extremely likely” (5). Figure 18 shows the results.

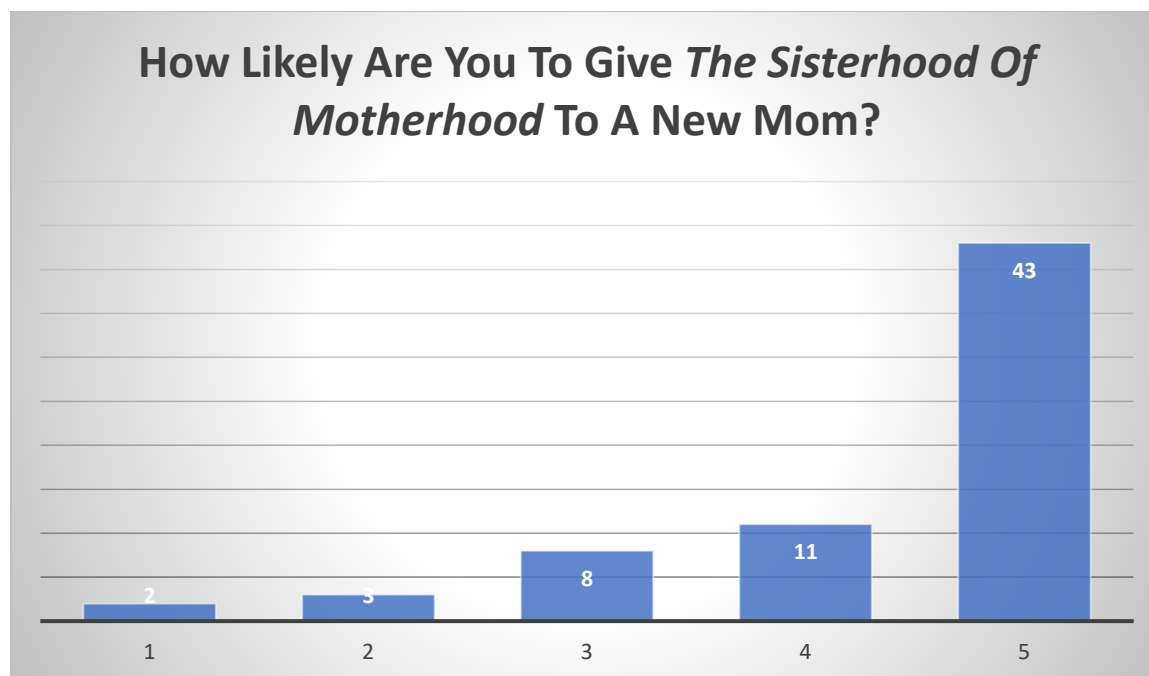


Figure 18. Post Survey: How likely are you to give *The Sisterhood of Motherhood* to a new mom?

Overwhelmingly, women showed excitement to give out the book to new moms. Two-thirds of the women gave it the highest mark and believed they are extremely likely to give it to a new mom.

Conclusions

The preliminary survey showed that Millennial moms are going through a huge life change and that the majority of them do not feel like they have the community support that they desire. Those who do not attend church believe that this support cannot be found through Christian community or church involvement. After reading *The Sisterhood of Motherhood*, Millennial moms viewed the church more positively. This devotional could be a

tool to help leverage the time of early motherhood with the Millennial Generation. Further recommendations are given on how to reach young moms.

Recommendations

Originally this devotional was meant to reach Millennial moms in Charlotte, North Carolina. It was intended to stay local so that local moms could know that they had local support and that the author of the story they connected with lived nearby.

Because the majority of the readers did connect with the authors and would like to spend time with them, it is recommended that each church or town find a way to create their own devotional. It could be a collection of women from different churches or it could be one church like Lake Forest Church. A template could be created so that each community could compile their own stories and put them into the same beautiful format and graphic design as *The Sisterhood of Motherhood*.

The hope is that women in communities around the world could connect with a specific story or two and feel like if they went to that church, they would have someone who could understand them. If a woman is completely outside the church, she may feel safe to enter into the church. If she is nominally involved in the church, she may take a step towards connecting with other moms.

The church must find ways to support these moms. These women see a huge difference between what the church could offer and what the church currently offers. Among those who claim to be a Christian, they see the church as relevant, but they do not see the church offering much of value to young moms. For those outside the church, they do not see the church as

Working moms struggle because a lot of church offerings happen during the day while they are working. Some moms reported feeling judged because it feels like the philosophy of the church is that a new mom should be home with her child. Research shows that many women are forced to work to support their family.⁶ The church needs to be a place where they do not feel judged for that life choice. They are most likely already feeling that guilt and judgement. Offering support for working moms could be a great way for women to feel support and gain a positive image of the church.

Many women commented that they would appreciate childcare opportunities. This could be a morning to drop off their children while they go shopping or run errands or have a Bible study or support group. Some women complained that when they do want to join a group, the childcare option costs too much money. Perhaps churches can find ways to make childcare affordable during mom groups. Some women wanted childcare in the evening with the expectation that the mom could have time to herself or time to have a date with her spouse/significant other.

The church environment itself during worship is important for new moms. Many women wrote about churches where it was easy to nurse during the service and how that encouraged them to come to church each week. These women also found community as they nursed/bottle fed their babies in a quiet room where they could listen to the sermon. Other women commented that they did not have a room like this in their current church and how that has made it hard to be able to go to church with a young child. Life is hard enough for these

6. Jean Twenge, *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled – and More Miserable Than Ever Before* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc), 1994, 170.

women. If the church can create a room/environment where moms can come and relax and be filled spiritually while connecting with their child and other moms, perhaps more young people would come out early on a Sunday morning to go to church. Some moms have no problem nursing their crying baby in a church service, but for some women this isn't an option and the church should allow them a space to worship comfortably.

Other than the answer, "offer moms support," the answer that was given the most centered on the idea of offering a mentorship program to young moms. One mom commented on how her friends don't have their own mothers nearby and they need that motherly support. They want to hear from moms who have been there before. They want to learn from these older moms' mistakes and victories. Respondents thought it would be great to be matched up with an older mom for experience and encouragement. One suggested having a "team" of moms of all different ages who would be assigned to a new mom to show her how life could work now that she has a child.

This mentorship idea is worth exploring. It was something the author of this project wanted to begin but was not able to start because of her move to China. Perhaps churches could find older ladies who would be good mentors and match them up with Millennials when they are pregnant.

The Sisterhood of Motherhood also offers a way for women to be missionaries in their own mission fields. In the post-survey, women were very optimistic about giving the devotional to a new mom. The majority of moms said they were extremely likely to pass it on.

Andy Stanley discovered five catalysts involved in every faith story. Catalyst number three is “Personal Ministry.” He found that whether people feel prepared or not, those moments of relying on God to be out there doing His ministry, are faith changing moments.⁷

The Sisterhood of Motherhood could be a catalyst for a tangible way for women to have their own “personal ministry.” It could be comfortable or uncomfortable for them to give the devotional to a new mom. It could be awkward to check back in with them and see how they are doing. But when they give the devotional it can be an act of personal ministry. This could help not only the faith and the personal views of the lady receiving the devotional, but it could also help the faith and the personal views of the lady who is giving the devotional to someone she knows. The devotional can help with the faith development of both the receiver and the giver. It can set up women for boldness to look for friends who could come to church or connect with the church. It can help them see themselves as missionaries who are looking for hurting moms they can bring into community.

7. Andy Stanley, *Deep and Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched and Churched People Love to Attend* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 124-130.

APPENDIX A



New Mom Survey

Disclosure: This survey is designed to discover what life is like for new millennial moms in Charlotte, NC. Participants must have been born between 1980-2000, live in the Charlotte area, and have had a child in the past 12 months. The information you provide will be helpful for learning how to connect and support young moms. This study is being conducted by Tiffany Arachikavitz and Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary. Please be assured that all of your answers will be kept strictly confidential. The information that you provide will be presented only in summary form, in combination with the responses of other participants in this study. The answers that you give will never be linked with your name. Your answers will be linked to your e-mail address where a third party will generate a random winner of the \$25 Amazon gift card, but then your e-mail address will be taken off of your answers. By completing this questionnaire, you have given your consent that you are a voluntary participant in this study.

Email address *

Valid email address

This form is collecting email addresses. [Change settings](#)

1. How much has your life changed since having a baby? *

1 2 3 4 5

No Change ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Complete change

2. How is the condition of your life now compared to before having children? *

1 2 3 4 5

Significantly easier ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Significantly more difficult

3. What factors have changed in your life since becoming a mother? *

	Significantly I...	Somewhat Im...	Stayed the sa...	Somewhat De...	Significantly D...
Health	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fitness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Amount Of Fel...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stress Level	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sleep Patterns	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sense of Cont...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Finances	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Romantic inter...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Body image	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Employment S...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Amount Of Per...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hygiene	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mental Health	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. What has been the hardest part of having a child? *

Long answer text

4. How would you describe your religious affiliation? *

- ☐ Atheist
- ☐ Agnostic
- ☐ Buddhist
- ☐ Christian
- ☐ Hindu
- ☐ Jew
- ☐ Muslim
- ☐ None
- ☐ Prefer not to answer
- ☐ Other...

5. How would you describe your Christian church attendance? *

- ☐ Attend a Christian church regularly
- ☐ Periodically attend a Christian church
- ☐ Previously attended a Christian church as an adult but do not any more

- ☐ Previously attended a Christian church as a child but do not any more
- ☐ Have attended a Christian church, but never regularly
- ☐ Never attended a Christian church

6. How relevant is the Christian church to your role as a mother? *

Not relevant at all 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely relevant

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

7. How much do you think the Christian church offers of value to young moms? *

Doesn't offer anything 1 2 3 4 5 Offers an extremely high amount

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

8. What could a local Christian church do that you would find valuable as a new mother? *

Long answer text

9. How much support do you feel you have from other moms in Charlotte? *

No support 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely high amount of support

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

10. How would you describe your satisfaction with your relationships with other moms in Charlotte? *

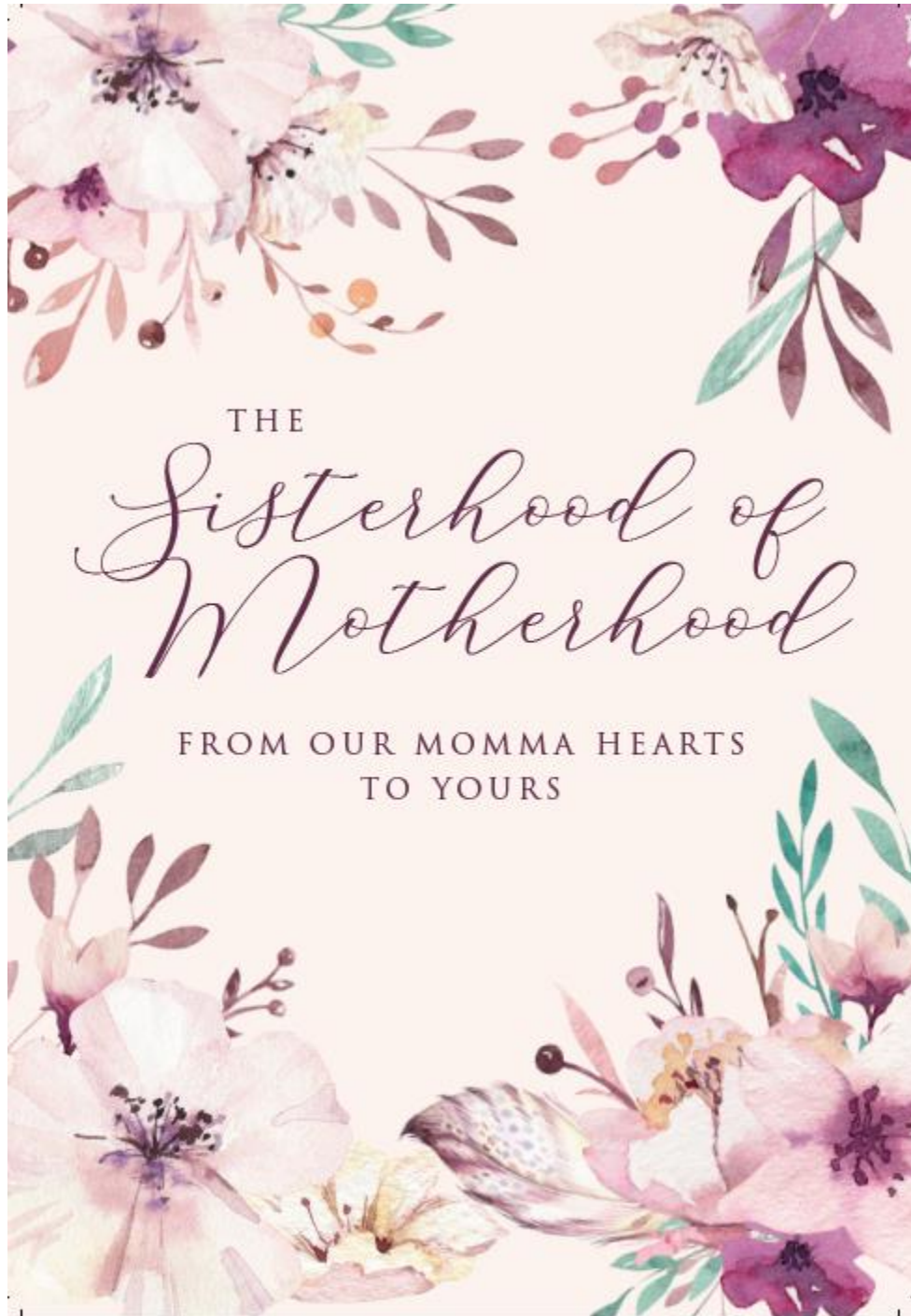
- ☐ Extremely satisfied – I don't need to find more mom friends
- ☐ Satisfied – I have mom friends but it could be nice to find more mom friends
- ☐ Somewhat satisfied – While I do have some mom friends, I feel like I need more mom friends
- ☐ Not satisfied – I am desperate to find connections with other moms

11. How well do you think moms in the Christian church can relate to you personally? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not relate to me at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely relate to me

APPENDIX B

New mom devotional –





THESE ARE THE STORIES OF WOMEN WHO CARE DEEPLY,
NOT ONLY FOR THEIR OWN CHILDREN, BUT FOR OTHER
MOMS LEARNING TO LOVE THEIR FAMILIES.

*May you feel the love of
God through the pages of
this book. May God speak
to you where you are.*

WELCOME TO THE TRIBE, MAMA.
IT'S GOING TO BE A WILD RIDE.

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WELCOME TO THE TRIBE

It is a sisterhood of millions of women currently living on the earth and billions of women who have gone before us. Women of every color, nation, tribe, and tongue. Some of us came to join this tribe reluctantly, some came excitedly, some came by accident, some came by years and years of agonizing and waiting. Every woman's motherhood journey looks different.

One of the first things you discover as you become a mother is that everyone will have an opinion for just about everything you could or should do. This is not a book to show you how to parent. This is a book to give you a glimpse into the lives of 20 other mothers. Some of their stories may ring true to your own. Some may give you a perspective on how another mom is journeying. Some may cause a stirring in your heart, others may bring tears to your eyes. We pray it will give you encouragement and hope. You are not alone. There are other mothers who are crying, laughing, screaming, and longing with you. There is also a God who sees it all and is with you in the midst of 3am feedings and mommy-break-downs and moments your heart is so full it almost explodes.

There is no right or wrong way to read this book. Even if you aren't a first-time mom, this book is for you.

LOVE,

Tiffany Arachkavitz

PERFECTION

Perfection. For me, this concept has always been a struggle. I strive for perfection even when I know it's not attainable. Teachers always listed 'perfectionist' on my school reports. Family and friends would describe me as someone who wants things to be perfect. But for my 3 year old, Perfection was just a new game she'd received for her birthday. You know, the one where you have to fit all the shapes in the right spot before the time runs out and they pop up everywhere. Talk about stressful!

As I was teaching my daughter how to play her new game, I realized something. She was never going to get all those shapes in the correct spot before the time ran out. But she didn't care! She just laughed hysterically when they popped out everywhere. And then she tried again. It's funny how kids have a way of teaching us things while we are trying to teach them. Life is not going to go the way we planned. And motherhood, in particular, is something we cannot perfect.

God reminds us that only He is perfect and only He has the ability to do all that is right. We can fight Him on it, and try to control our lives, but it will only bring greater chaos. Don't get me wrong, this is NOT easy. We love our children SO much. We don't want anything bad to happen to them. But they are God's children first. He has a plan, one that is far better than anything we could imagine. We just need to look to Him first, and ask for His wisdom before anything else.

We all fall short. Not just me; not just you; ALL of us. Please remember that every other mom out there is struggling. Outward appearance or social media might tell you otherwise, but everyone struggles. Everyone needs God and His grace and mercy. Maybe you gave your toddler macaroni and cheese three nights in a row because the baby was sick. Maybe you lost your temper with your husband for no good reason. Or maybe you got to the store and realized you never buckled your child in their car seat (I'm pretty sure all my friends have admitted to this happening at least once). Whatever it is, God will show grace because you are not perfect. You will never be perfect. So when you feel rushed and are struggling to get everything done; when you can't seem to figure it out and all the pieces pop out of place; just remember to laugh. Trust in God. And try again.

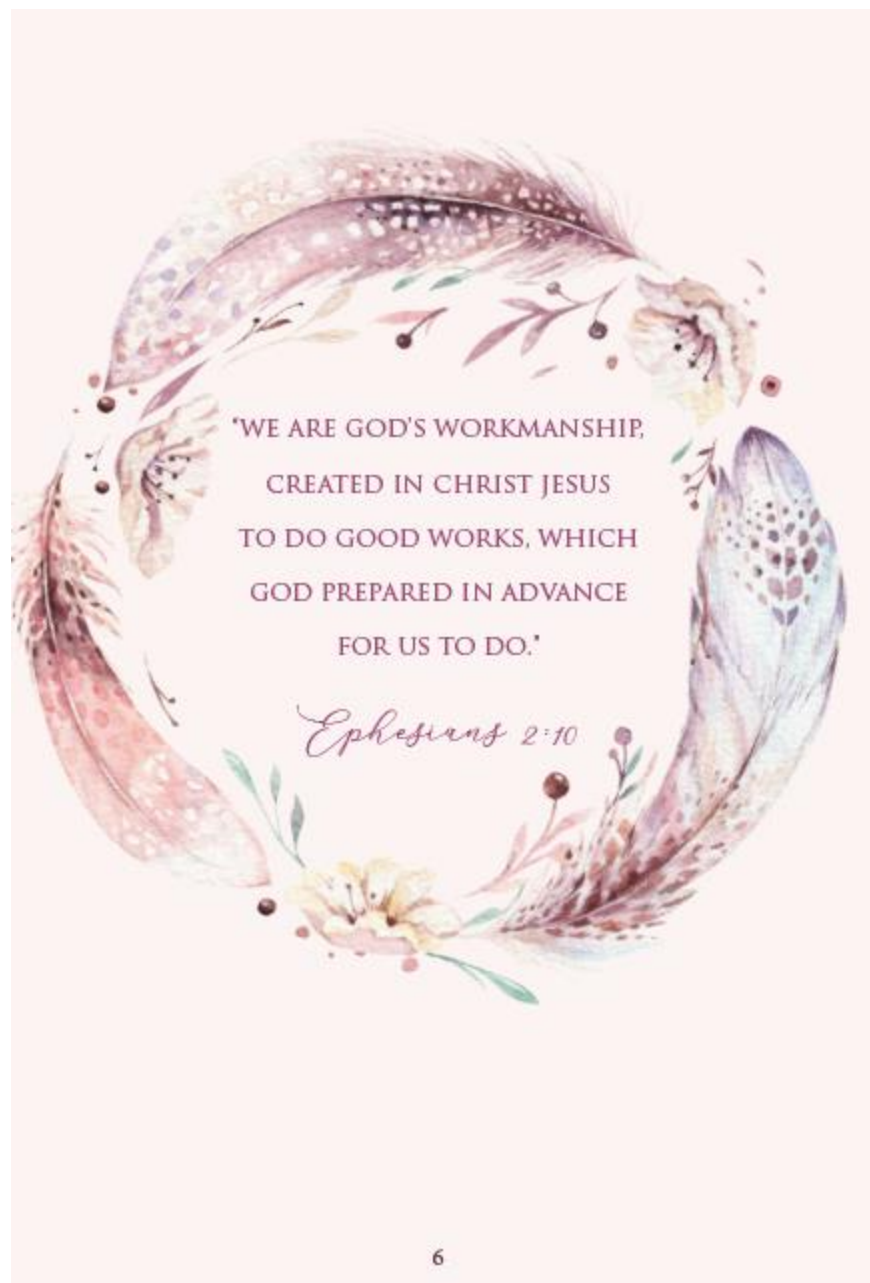
LOVE,

Jessica Fields

'FOR ALL HAVE SINNED AND FALL SHORT
OF THE GLORY OF GOD'

Romans 3:23





ONE ANGSTY MAMA

When I had my first baby, I was one angsty mama. I probably read too many books. One book said let 'em cry; the other said don't let 'em cry. One said feed 'em on a schedule; the other, feed 'em on demand. I never felt like I was doing it right.

My baby Dylan and I went to a playgroup with a bunch of comatose baby girls, and Dylan was the only one to crawl everywhere and touch everything. He adored the breakable objects, electrical outlets, and what we called "no-no cords." I came to dread this playgroup, and when I quit, my inquisitive baby and I were much more content.

Some of my friends could manage to have adult conversations with their baby in tow. Not me. I was a terrible multi-tasker, unable to concentrate on baby and friends at the same time. Plus, my Dylan had the spirit of a Labrador puppy. Babysitters and preschool were my only hope for a social life, despite our limited funds.

I relaxed into motherhood when I realized there wasn't one mathematical formula for raising a baby. If there were, I think God would have given it to us. God not only made every baby unique, but He made every mother and father and family system unique. Each family is "fearfully and wonderfully made" with an exclusive "ordained" purpose.

The God who created a million species of insects likes to create new things. He made 17,000 different kinds of butterflies alone, just for kicks. He made some babies who go with the flow, others who don't. He made some mamas who can demand feed without going stark-raving mad, and others, like me, who need more of a schedule.

Our creative Father didn't want to keep re-inventing the 'perfect pants family' in the parenting book, or your own family of origin, or your friend's 'Facebook-terrific family'. He already did those families. No, he preferred to create your 'never-been-done-before family,' with its own individual and collective quirks. The particular blend of your family has its own special stank and its own exclusive contribution in the kingdom of God.

Learn from the parenting books. Learn from the parents around you. Try on new ideas. Just know your family won't be like any other, just as God intended.

LOVE,

Angie Moses



JOY AFTER LOSS

At 36 weeks pregnant with our second child, I awoke to a contraction that would not release. My baby shower was scheduled for that weekend and I worried that she might arrive before we were totally prepared. Something felt 'off' but I stayed calm. We called the doctor who recommended coming in. Halfway there I began to lose feeling in my arms and panic set in.

The full story of that day is seared onto my heart forever. I'd suffered a concealed placental abruption and after a crash c-section, our wildflower fought for 9 days in the NICU before we chose to let her body take its rest. Violet was stunningly beautiful and had been so active in my tummy. Had this really happened?

Over the following nine months I found myself bulldozed by the additional losses of my maternal grandmother and mother. One year, three generations of women: gone. And then, not even a week after my Moms death, through my stupor...I realized I was late. For the first time in my life, I gasped through a tidal wave of anxiety. Loss seemed all too certain. God had allowed these loves' of mine to be ripped away and I felt left helpless. I was raw. I could not take any more and I fully expected the worst.

I carried our third child, a second son, to full term. He was born without a hiccup and has been pure sunshine in our home since. I have struggled hard missing my little girl. I expect there are countless treasures between a

Mommy and her daughter that I will never experience. I've also struggled with the guilt of being happy even though one of my children is gone. How long are you supposed to sit in grief? When is it okay to laugh again? Would people think we were trying to replace her with another child? And above all...why?

Here's what I do know: We live in a fallen world, but this life is brief as a vapor. God's ways are not our own. He is a good and loving God and He will not leave or forsake us. And God loves our children even more than we are capable of loving them ourselves. There are days where nothing makes sense, fear creeps in and I have to remind myself of these truths. Choosing joy takes intention and for me, will surely be a lifelong practice with hope.

LOVE,

Shelby Burch

"WEEPING MAY ENDURE FOR A NIGHT,
BUT JOY COMES WITH THE MORNING."

Psalms 30:5

SEASONS

I was crippled under the weight of guilt and shame. It wasn't supposed to be like this. We had prayed for this child for two years, and now we were home from adopting our son in South Africa. But the mess of transitioning our family from five to six was nothing like the rosy colored stories of post adoption I had read.

My expectations shattered under the insanity of parenting four children. I began to blame God for the disaster in my home and anger consumed my heart. If only I had remembered in that season to draw closer to God instead of pushing Him away.

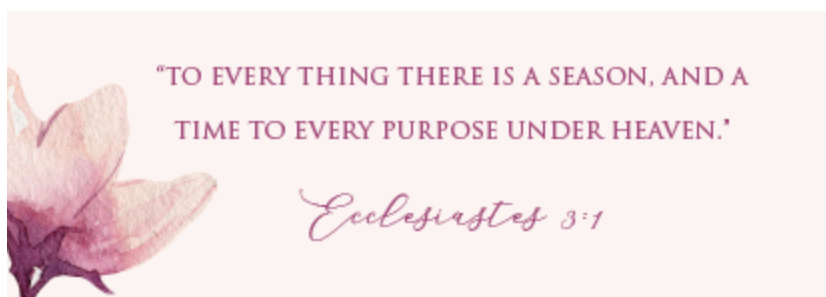
These seasons we go through as Mamas are hard, there's no getting around it. For some it's a post adoption transition, for others it's a season of nighttime wake up calls that never seems to end.

Now that I have a teenager, I can tell you they are all seasons. The hardest thing you're dealing with right now will end. You may not see the light at the end of the tunnel yet, but I promise you it's there. I'm not going to tell you to savor each moment in every season, because sometimes you just have to be okay with things not being okay.

That's what I forgot. I forgot to allow the difficulty to be. I forgot to ask God what He wanted me to learn in that season. I forgot to let grace flood my heart and wash away the expectations I had.

I don't want you to forget. God is more interested in who you are becoming because of your reliance on Him than anything else. So while I won't tell you to savor each moment, I will tell you to look for God in them. Ask him what lesson is in the mess.

Because after 13 years of parenting, I've discovered how beautiful the broken pieces are when they're mended together by God. And the more I learn to rely on Him in the quieter seasons, the easier it is to turn to Him when the next hard one comes along.



Just remember, you're not superwoman! We have an amazing Jesus who tells us to come to Him when we're weary. We don't have to do everything with our own strength. Let the hard days go, along with any guilt, and let grace abound instead.

LOVE,

Jen Fletcher

ALONE IN THE EARLY MONTHS

I had never felt more joyous and more trapped in my entire life. There it was, the child I had dreamt of since I was a little girl. The love I felt was more I than I ever thought I was capable of. It was good, I was complete. So why did I feel so alone?

During those early months of parenting I became so addicted to control that I could not let anyone into my life or see who I was beyond being a mother. Nap schedules, feeding nuances, and fear of fussing babies kept the whole world away. I was full with the joys of mothering and yet void of the joys of being God's child. I had spiritual gifts, but what were they again? I had things to offer people, but how could I with a baby on my hip? I was a mom, but am I still a friend, a wife, a servant of the body of Christ?

By baby number three, I had to learn how to compromise on some mothering things in order to reopen my spiritual life. There is never a perfect time to belong to a Bible study, or grab a coffee with a friend, or serve on a ministry team. Babies don't budge, but they are way more adaptable than I ever realized and three years into mothering I emboldened to make a change. A change back into the land of the living. A change back into community.

I realize this is a journey we all have to experience for ourselves, but if I could go back and hold new momma me in my arms, I would tell her that it is okay to trust Jesus with your burdens, He is good and can handle them.

God wants to make a trade with you today, He doesn't want you to wait until you have it all together, until your baby is eating solids, until they are sleeping through the night. He wants to trade your burdens for His now. New Momma, it's okay to make sacrifices for the sake of spiritual health. It's okay to trade in the burden of 'mommying' for a lighter load. There is hope for you sweet sister and I pray that God's load is just the lightness you need.

LOVE,

Maria Furlough

'COME TO ME, ALL YOU WHO ARE WEARY
AND BURDENED, AND I WILL GIVE YOU
REST. TAKE MY YOKE UPON YOU AND
LEARN FROM ME, FOR I AM GENTLE AND
HUMBLE IN HEART, AND YOU WILL FIND
REST FOR YOUR SOULS. FOR MY YOKE IS
EASY AND MY BURDEN IS LIGHT.'

Matthew 11:28-30



FINDING STRENGTH

I was juggling three jobs when I found out I was pregnant. My days were spent either sleeping or working and I wondered how I'd get through 9 whole months of being THAT tired. On top of the physical exhaustion, there was also a layer of fear and worry that was mentally draining. Would I know what to do? Would I do well at being a mother? One day as I was driving from my teaching job to my nanny job, I heard a song on the radio that brought tears to my eyes. Though I can't remember the song, there was a little girl citing a verse at the end of it which I'll never forget;

'DO YOU NOT KNOW? HAVE YOU NOT HEARD? THE LORD IS THE EVERLASTING GOD, THE CREATOR OF THE ENDS OF THE EARTH. HE WILL NOT GROW TIRED OR WEARY, AND HIS UNDERSTANDING NO ONE CAN FATHOM. HE GIVES STRENGTH TO THE WEARY AND INCREASES THE POWER OF THE WEAK. EVEN YOUTHS GROW TIRED AND WEARY, AND YOUNG MEN STUMBLE AND FALL; BUT THOSE WHO HOPE IN THE LORD WILL RENEW THEIR STRENGTH. THEY WILL SOAR ON WINGS LIKE EAGLES; THEY WILL RUN AND NOT GROW WEARY, THEY WILL WALK AND NOT BE FAINT.'

Isaiah 40:28-31

My dear Mommy friend, I can't even begin to explain to you what happened in my heart that day. As I sobbed at the stop light I had so many thoughts running through my mind. Why was I trying to do this alone? I'll never find the strength within myself. My strength comes from the LORD. He will not grow tired or weary, and I can lean into him! I had totally been forgetting to lean into HIM!

I wish I could say it was all smooth sailing after that moment. I thought by the time I had my second and third babies that maybe I would know what I was doing. There were some very dark days and days filled with so much joy I thought my heart would burst. At ages 7, 5, and 4 there are still days that I find myself trying to balance and control this whole motherhood thing on my own. When I remember the hope I have in the Lord I am able to renew my strength. When I stand in that renewed strength, I remember what an absolute JOY it is to be a child of God, and to have been trusted by HIM to be a mother.

LOVE,

Kathy Wykoff



NOT MY BODY

I loved pregnancy. I mean LOVED it. If I could be 36 weeks pregnant for the rest of my life, I would. I loved having my baby 100% to myself. I loved the belly rubs and comments from strangers. I loved the way I looked and felt. I still thank God daily for the gift of pregnancy.

I delivered my healthy baby boy at 39 weeks and 2 days. I left the hospital weighing less than I did before I got pregnant. Awesome, right?! Who knew that my postpartum body would look better than it did before? Again, thank you, God. Cross that (very shallow) stress off of the list of things to worry about. Since I, “didn’t have to worry about my body,” I was able to give all of me to my brand-new baby who, literally, needed every part of my being. I was able to breastfeed my baby for six months—goodness, what a roller coaster. After another month of pumping, I decided we were going to be done with our breastfeeding journey. It took a few weeks to officially, “dry up” and be done with that part of motherhood.

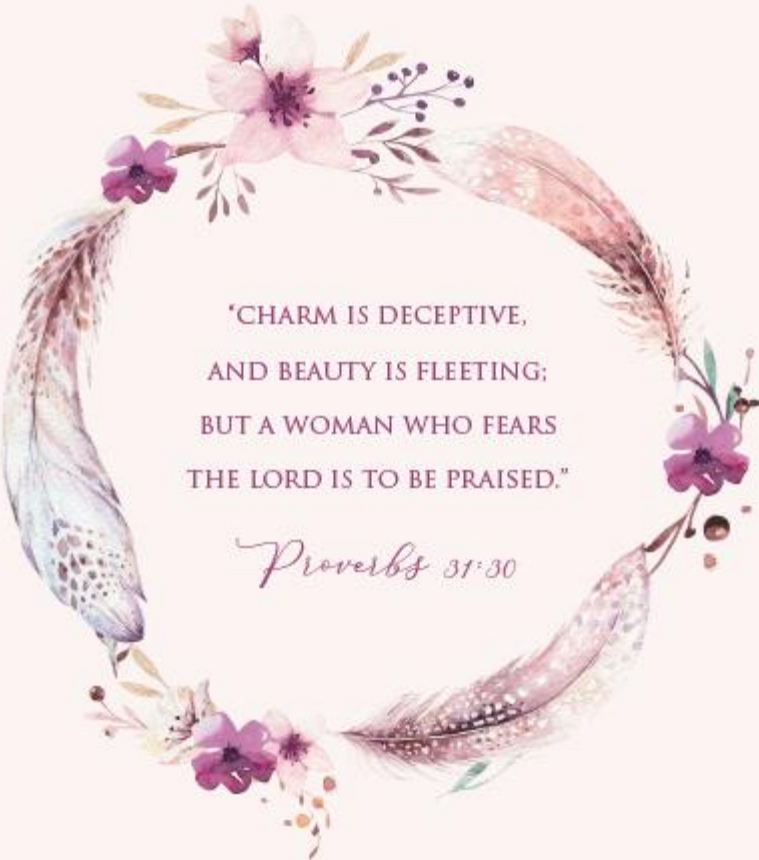
Now, my hormones are back to “normal” (what is normal?) and my body is officially mine again, although not in the dream form I’d hoped—saggy breasts, a fluffy torso, less hair and, a much looser, set of thighs and buns. Now that we are sleeping through the night (most nights), have a loose routine in place and I can finally decipher which cry means what, I have the time to spend a few minutes with myself. I find lots of those minutes looking at myself feeling down... down about how I look. I know I am one of many women struggling with my body image. I catch a glimpse

of myself in a reflection and the thoughts creep in... I immediately have to remind myself that God created me to house my baby for nine (or Ten... however they calculate that) months. He created me to birth my baby. He created me to provide for my baby... Most importantly, he created me to raise a child to love Him. Every lump, bump, broken piece of hair, loose piece of skin is a reminder that He is good. Who am I to question the way I look when He created me to look just the way I am?

Momma, you too are "fearfully and wonderfully made..." Every part of your mental, emotional and physical being was hand-picked. Every part of your growing baby was hand-picked. You are beautiful. We are beautiful. We truly have so much to be thankful for.

LOVE,

Siara De Nicola



'CHARM IS DECEPTIVE,
AND BEAUTY IS FLEETING;
BUT A WOMAN WHO FEARS
THE LORD IS TO BE PRAISED.'

Proverbs 31:30

MY OWN EXPECTATIONS

When I look back on my pregnancy and early days of infancy, I see a woman who had no clue but sure thought she did. I remember being there for friends when they had babies and was sure I had it all figured out.

My first pregnancy was mostly good, but I had to trust God fully during delivery because things did not go as smoothly as my pregnancy. I remember relying on Him and having a peace about the situation. My first baby was fairly easy, however, it does not mean it was not hard. I remember having nights where I didn't think I could get up again, days when breastfeeding hurt so bad I had to pray through my tears. Despite having a wonderful supportive husband and family, this was not what I expected. God showed me to be careful about expectations and let Him guide me. I had to replace my unmet expectations with hope, faith and trust in God. This is still a struggle for me!

Having a child is the most miraculous, coolest God thing ever, but it will also humble you, strengthen you and teach you so many valuable lessons. Parts of motherhood are some of the hardest parts of my life and also some of the most wonderful and rewarding parts of my life. Don't ever let your thoughts and feelings give you guilt. God does not want that for His children. He wants us to bring those feelings to Him and to other moms and women.

Make sure you take care of yourself because if you're not then you're not giving your baby your best self. Try to take a shower and get out of the house every day even if it's just a walk down the street or sitting in the backyard, it grounds you and helps change your scenery. Also, find a group of Christian women for fellowship and support, you will find this to be a lifesaver, and it's one of God's purposes for community in Him.

LOVE,

Beulah Stitt



GIVING UP CONTROL

As I sat in the doctor's sonogram office at 20 weeks pregnant, I had one thought on my mind. Please, please, please don't see a penis. I had a one-year old boy at home who I loved with all my heart, but I was desperate for this one to wear pink. I loved the dinosaurs and race cars and puppy dogs, but I longed for bows and Barbies and dresses.

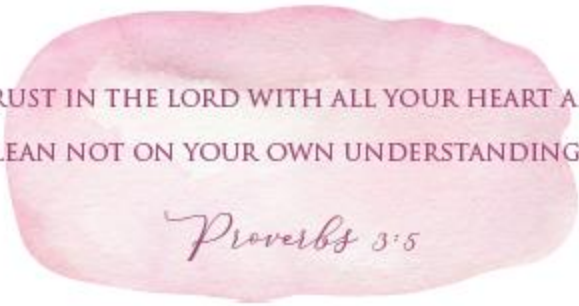
If anything in this world shows us that we are not in control, it is being a parent. The process of starting a family brought so many questions to God. It started in the beginning. Why can't we get pregnant? Is there something wrong with me? Something wrong with my husband? God, do you know that I would be a horrible mom? And then when we finally did get pregnant, more questions to God. Why can't I be cute pregnant like my friends? Why do I have to crave the foods that I'm not supposed to eat?

But the biggest question of all, why did there have to be another penis on that ultrasound? Another boy? Really? I walked out of the doctor's office that day and sat in my car and wept. I knew I was blessed. What a miracle to get pregnant again. But why would you give me this desire for a daughter and then make all my children boys?

As my three little guys grew, the questions just kept coming. Why did he have to be born prematurely? Why did he have to have problems nursing? Why can't I have a child who sleeps through the night? Why does he cry enough to get kicked out of daycare? Why, why, why?

I have such a beautiful picture of who my child is supposed to be. And over and over again my child does not live up to those expectations. I want to control who my child is. But I can't. So what do I do?

I trust. If I can't control who my child is, I learn to trust the One who is in control. He knew before time began that one day I would have dirty, hyper, loving boys. He knew who they would be and He created them that way on purpose and with a purpose. I can trust that as much as I want what's best for my children, God wants it even more.



'TRUST IN THE LORD WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND
LEAN NOT ON YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING;'

Proverbs 3:5

My lack of control with my children has taught me the depth of love that God has for us. It has taught me that trusting God is better than having answers to all of my questions. I pray that you too will learn that our children will never be perfect but that we can point them to a God who is, and we can rest in His care until the day when all of our questions will be answered. Can you give up your desires for your child and trust those to God today?

LOVE,

Tiffany Arachkavitz



"BEFORE I FORMED YOU IN THE WOMB, I KNEW YOU,
AND BEFORE YOU WERE BORN, I CONSECRATED YOU;
I APPOINTED YOU A PROPHET TO THE NATIONS."

Jeremiah 1:5

CHOSEN TO BE THEIR MOMMY

When my son was about 3 years old, we were playing together on the floor. He looked at me with his big brown eyes and told me that he chose me to be his mommy. He was such an easy baby. My pregnancy was a breeze, he slept like an angel, and was so happy all the time.

Years later, my daughter was born. My pregnancy was a rough one. I was so sick, experienced frequent spotting and was ultimately put on bed rest. I was so afraid she wouldn't be healthy, that I wasn't doing all I could to keep her safe.

She finally came into the world a perfect, beautiful baby and I was so relieved! Now, I could have help ensuring her health and safety. She was here and others could help take care of her so I could get a break. I didn't take into consideration my extended family was 11 hours away and my husband traveled all the time for work. I didn't have the help and support I so desperately longed for.

My sweet daughter took so much of my time and energy. I constantly felt guilty that I didn't have enough for my son and worried I would never have enough for my daughter. How could I be the mom I always thought I would be? I had so many plans and dreams. I felt like I was failing.

I began to realize the three a.m. feedings were a blessing. Everyone was asleep, the house was so quiet. It was a lonely time for me, but it became a time of reflection. I talked to myself, a lot, until it became having conversations with God. He taught me that not only was I to help mold these beautiful children He gave me, but they were given to me to help shape the woman I am today.

When my daughter was around three years old, she told me that she chose me to be her mommy. It still takes my breath away when I think about this. My children are eight years apart and they both delivered the same sweet message. Even though I doubt myself at times, I now understand these two amazing humans were a gift to me from God and I am enough.

LOVE,

Bernie Wildman

PREGNANCY PAIN TO JOY

Getting pregnant the first time was a gift so graciously given to me that I assumed it would always be that easy.

Our first daughter was the rowdiest most curious little girl. On one of her first play dates she escaped out of the play room and into the attic of my friend's house. I felt embarrassed that I couldn't keep my small child under control. A week later she pulled down an XL iced tea off the counter onto herself during Bible study. I struggled with how to deal with a rambunctious little human. My husband and I were both teachers so we just assumed we had this parenting thing in the bag.

Shortly after these events we learned that we were pregnant again. Despite the difficulties of the last seven months, we couldn't wait to continue to grow our family and work through the difficult times.

But two months later, we miscarried. And six months after that, God took up another sweet baby. After such an easy first pregnancy I could not understand why I was being punished with this loss and crushed with pain over these two little lives?

The Lord had a different plan to rock my world and teach me what I couldn't see all along. I had a beautiful, smart, thriving, independent and HEALTHY little girl. Why was I wishing things were different? God taught me that life is PRECIOUS. That our little girl, who I had wanted to change,

was absolutely PERFECT in every single way. That her extreme personality traits would one day serve her well. Her “character flaws” were not flaws at all, but gifts FROM THE LORD which will not only serve her but are teaching and humbling ME!

Who would have ever thought that the Lord could use something as devastating as two miscarriages to give us such clarity for loving our little girl. What a humbling moment to be at such a low and for the Lord to work in such a way to shed so much positive light on what we already had right in front of us. I’ve sat with the Lord to commit to raising our fiery little girl to be an ember, a light, a burning fire for the Lord. And Lord knows there are days where I have to stop and remind myself of the lesson learned but I always think back to this verse:

“FOR YOU CREATED MY INMOST BEING;
YOU KNIT ME TOGETHER IN MY MOTHER’S WOMB.
I PRAISE YOU BECAUSE I AM FEARFULLY AND
WONDERFULLY MADE; YOUR WORKS ARE WONDERFUL,
I KNOW THAT FULL WELL.”

Psalm 139:13-14



LOVE,

HE'S GOT THIS

“**W**hat are your hopes for this birth experience?” the nurse who looked just like J Lo asked me as I laid in the hospital bed after the contractions had begun. “A healthy baby boy” was my reply.

Fast forward, the birthing experience was nothing out of the ordinary and once our little guy Zach was born, all I could say was “He is perfect!” and perfect he was...perfectly made in the image of God and perfectly chosen for our family!

The next morning the Doctor came in and said “I see markers on Zach that lead me to believe he has Down Syndrome.” I instantly knew that my world would never be the same. There was grief that followed, grief from the dreams we did not even know we had for our son. “Will he have friends?” “Will he play sports?” “Will we ever go on vacation” and “Is this really happening to us?”

Ten years later being able to experience Zach’s laugh, his hugs and kisses, his stubborn nature (and yes, kids with Down Syndrome are not all angels all the time - only a stereotype), the way he draws so many people to him when he walks in a room, I would not trade him having that extra chromosome for the world.

There are verses we may read often and even skim over after we have read them so many different times. One such verse changed everything for me

in those first few weeks and even now. You see, when I would look into the future I became very anxious but, all of a sudden this verse came to life in a new way.



"DO NOT WORRY ABOUT TOMORROW FOR
TOMORROW HAS ENOUGH WORRIES OF ITS OWN."

Matthew 6:34

There was nothing good that came from looking ahead and asking all the "what ifs." I could look at Zach that day and just enjoy him for what was happening that day. Has this journey been without heartache? No way! But there has been a peace that comes with knowing that God has today in His hands, and tomorrow and the days to come. He will give us what we need.

So, dear one, no matter what comes your way, enjoy that precious child, knowing God has chosen you to be the parent and remember no matter how hard things get, He's got this!

LOVE,

Cammie Howard

MOTHERHOOD: LOST & FOUND

My journey into motherhood was a whirlwind, especially those first weeks. It was the middle of summer, but the days felt dark, and those dark summer days were difficult beyond description.

I was cooped up at home with a crying newborn. I had breastfeeding issues; my milk came in late and when it did the pain was excruciating. My C-section meant my mobility was limited - I couldn't even sit up straight from a reclined position without help. My legs were more swollen than before I gave birth. I got PUPPS (a nasty rash) after delivery. I had Thrush (and so did Baby). I slept 2 hours at a time, maybe. I could barely sneak into the shower because I had to nurse, pump, then bottle feed every 2-3 hours. My body felt broken. The "me" that I used to know was gone. I'm ashamed to admit that the thought "I've made a mistake" went through my head often. Becoming a mother was the most self-sacrificing thing I've ever done. My journey didn't feel beautiful like I expected it would be. But it was beautiful in a different way: It was beautiful because it was full of difficulty, full of self-growth. God was with me every step of the way and He was working on me. When I felt like I had lost myself completely. I learned that I was found in Jesus.

It took me longer than I care to admit to realize this truth. As I emerged out of those first months I began to understand that in becoming a mother, my heart and soul had become more like the heart and soul of Jesus. Jesus taught His disciples: I taught my newborn how to hold his head up and roll

over. Jesus served others: I changed diapers and distributed medicine. Jesus fed His people with fish and bread: I provided nourishment for my baby. Jesus' body was broken for us. My body was torn, swollen, and bruised from birth. Looking back, I realized that those small, mundane, everyday tasks that I was doing, the ones that felt so meaningless, actually comprised the most important work I've ever done in my life.

"THE LORD IS CLOSE TO THE BROKENHEARTED AND
SAVES THOSE WHO ARE CRUSHED IN SPIRIT."

Psalm 34:18



So, absolutely I had lost myself; but I also found my better self. And although on the outside I looked haggard and scared, on the inside my soul was renewed and more beautiful because of the loving sacrifices I made (and continue to make) every day.

LOVE,

Ali Miller

OUR REALITY AS MOMS

In a world where there are so many opinions, thoughts, and quick comments, where so many people disregard the truths of scripture, it is nice to find where our reality is located: with Christ. In different stages of life we have likely found our identity in the things we have done or haven't done. As moms, we often find that our identity is in our children. We make statements that are so strong that its as if we need a bumper sticker to be proud of our identity. And interestingly enough these statements usually begin with "I" or "my". I breastfed for 4 months, for 11 months, for 2 years or not at all. My kids read a book every day and we go to the library twice a week. My kids don't watch any TV. My kids watch the iPad in the restaurant. I only let my kids have fruit for dessert. I let my kids eat a whole cupcake before dinner (oops). I had a completely natural childbirth. There's no way I would have birth without medication. I couldn't imagine having more than 2 kids. I couldn't imagine staying home all day. I would never want to work when I have children to raise. My kids are going to private school. My kids are going to public school.

These decisions, while important, are not what defines us. Our identity is not in how good or bad we are 'mommying'. (Case in point: as I write this my daughter is crying and climbing all over me). All these statements have some good and some bad in them. The statements, and the decisions we make, are not what is most important. Our reality in Christ during this crazy season of motherhood is what's important. Our identity is actually found in Christ, and how we let him rule in our lives and our children's

lives, how we make decisions and statements pointing towards Christ that allows His love to flow from our decisions into our kid's lives. After all, our kids are His kids, and one day they will be searching for their reality which can only be found in Christ.

LOVE,

Kerik Farley



"THEREFORE DO NOT LET ANYONE JUDGE YOU
BY WHAT YOU EAT OR DRINK, OR WITH REGARD
TO A RELIGIOUS FESTIVAL, A NEW MOON
CELEBRATION OR A SABBATH DAY. THESE ARE A
SHADOW OF THE THINGS THAT WERE TO COME;
THE REALITY, HOWEVER, IS FOUND IN CHRIST."

Colossians 2:16-17

DEPTHS OF DEPRESSION

I never planned for postpartum depression. The intensity and depth of the depression after my first was strangling. I found myself thinking terrible things that make me cringe to put on paper right now, like, “What was I thinking having a baby? Can I give her back? How could one of the happiest moments of my life also be my worst?” I would nurse her and return to bed. I cried and cried. I remember going to my 8-week postpartum doctor appointment. Fortunately I have an incredible doctor who sat with me and listened to me cry while offering helpful feedback, like it’s okay to formula-feed your baby and not nurse. I didn’t want to formula-feed my baby, but it was a relief to know I could and I wouldn’t be a terrible mom. Then we talked about anti-anxiety medicine.

I felt like a million pounds lifted from my shoulders. I didn’t know what the heck I was doing. Sometimes I think medicine and therapy aren’t options for me. I don’t need that. But I stand here today telling you as a new momma, that if you need it, please don’t feel ashamed, embarrassed, or too proud to seek help. It was the best decision I made. I regret not getting help sooner because I didn’t enjoy my first few months with my baby. I look back at it with a mixture of PTSD and pain. I am the mom I am today because of the help I received.


When my second pregnancy rolled around, it was déjà vu: same pregnancy, delivery, and same postpartum depression, only this time I was equipped. I immediately took my medicine after my son was born and saw my therapist

soon after. It made all the difference. I enjoyed my son's newborn stage immensely. I learned and was willing to accept help and acknowledge that I needed to do this for my health, sanity, and my babies.

If there is anything I could tell you, new momma, it is to be kind to yourself. Allow yourself the grace day to day, hour to hour, minute to minute. Life doesn't always go to plan or I should say your plan. It is God's plan. Be open to accepting help in whatever form that it comes in - God, doctors, medicine, therapy, family, friends, etc. The life you choose is where it will take you.

LOVE,

Leah Saldarini



"YOU WILL KEEP IN PERFECT PEACE ALL WHO
TRUST IN YOU, ALL WHOSE THOUGHTS ARE
FIXED ON YOU! TRUST IN THE LORD ALWAYS,
FOR THE LORD GOD IS THE ETERNAL ROCK."

Isaiah 26:3-4

UNEXPECTED

It was fall of my senior year of college. Throughout my first three years, I worked 40-50 hours a week to support myself. I decided to take out a small student loan so I could enjoy and savor the moments of college for the last year. Some friends and I were headed to New York City over break. I hadn't been feeling well; I thought I had picked up a stomach bug. I was exhausted and nauseous. I continued to feel awful back home too. Finally, I headed to the doctor to see what was wrong. As it turns out, I was pregnant. Pregnant.

How could I be having a baby now? I'm not married! I just got into law school! I haven't finished undergrad! I'm only 21! What about my senior year? I am supposed to have fun, go to parties, and road trips with my friends! What will people think?

For nine long months, my life filled with unexpected changes. There were funny moments, awkward moments (WHY doesn't anyone tell you THOSE things about being pregnant?), and hard moments. My days were filled with fear and anxiety. Would I be a good mom? Could I give this child a good life? What if my daughter thinks she is unloved because she was unplanned?

I focused on finishing school. I was the big pregnant one walking through campus. I was not glowing like a first time mom should be during pregnancy. I was embarrassed and full of shame.

Before I knew it my baby girl arrived. She had a head full of hair and dark brown eyes. I fell in love. She was a calm, sweet baby. The circumstances of her conception did not determine the value of her life. God knit her together in my womb. The shame and embarrassment of her being unplanned slowly began to fade away. Let's not forget that the Savior of the world was an unexpected pregnancy! Immediately upon birth she had something in common with Jesus! How cool! Just because someone is unexpected does not mean they are not part of God's plan; even though a baby in my early twenties was not part of MY plan, it was intricately planned by God!

My sweet girl is now almost Ten, and the big sister of two younger siblings. My husband and I just celebrated our Ten year anniversary! Not a day goes by that I don't thank the Lord for bringing me where I am today. And just to think... everything that got me here all started with an 'unexpected plan.'

LOVE,

Becca Deal

'MANY ARE THE PLANS IN A PERSON'S HEART,
BUT IT IS THE LORD'S PLAN THAT PREVAILS.'

Proverbs 19:21



DIFFICULT BUT BEAUTIFUL

I always knew I wanted to be a mom. But, my journey didn't start out as I imagined. Not long after I got married we decided we wanted to go ahead and start a family. It's that easy right? Not for me.

Several miscarriages later, I began to wonder if my journey in life would include children at all. Like many people I strayed from God after high school and hadn't really made my way back to him, but I knew I wanted to raise my children in the church. My husband and I returned to church as we tried to start a family. I prayed so hard for God to help us and to keep me positive. The next pregnancy was finally different: the twelve week mark came, then twenty week mark. I was fearful and joyous and I prayed hourly that God would help my body keep this baby safe. I saw signs everywhere that God was with me on this journey.

At 35 weeks my water broke and we were not ready! We didn't have a bag packed and the car seat hadn't been installed, but my main worry was on the baby. I delivered a healthy (small) baby boy. He was perfect! God is so good! However, in the weeks that followed a new struggle emerged: I had what I'd prayed for but I couldn't stop crying and I just felt like I didn't know how to make this little human happy. My husband convinced me to go talk to someone and seriously it was the best thing for me. I needed someone to validate that what I was feeling was normal and that its okay! It's okay to cry and its okay to feel overwhelmed. The "will I ever sleep again?, what?! You can't be hungry already!" feeling is all normal.

This journey called motherhood is a roller-coaster of emotions. The ups and the downs and the feeling of just barely coasting by are all real, all normal and all okay! I had to really lean on God to get me through the early stages of motherhood.

Motherhood is difficult, but it is beautiful. I know that God helped me through my dark and hard times. Now my journey is fun and complicated in a different way, (with two toddlers in tow!). I always knew that I wanted to be a Mommy but I had no idea what to expect nor had anyone told me early on that it was expected to be overwhelming at times. Children truly are a reward and so worth all the challenges or struggles.

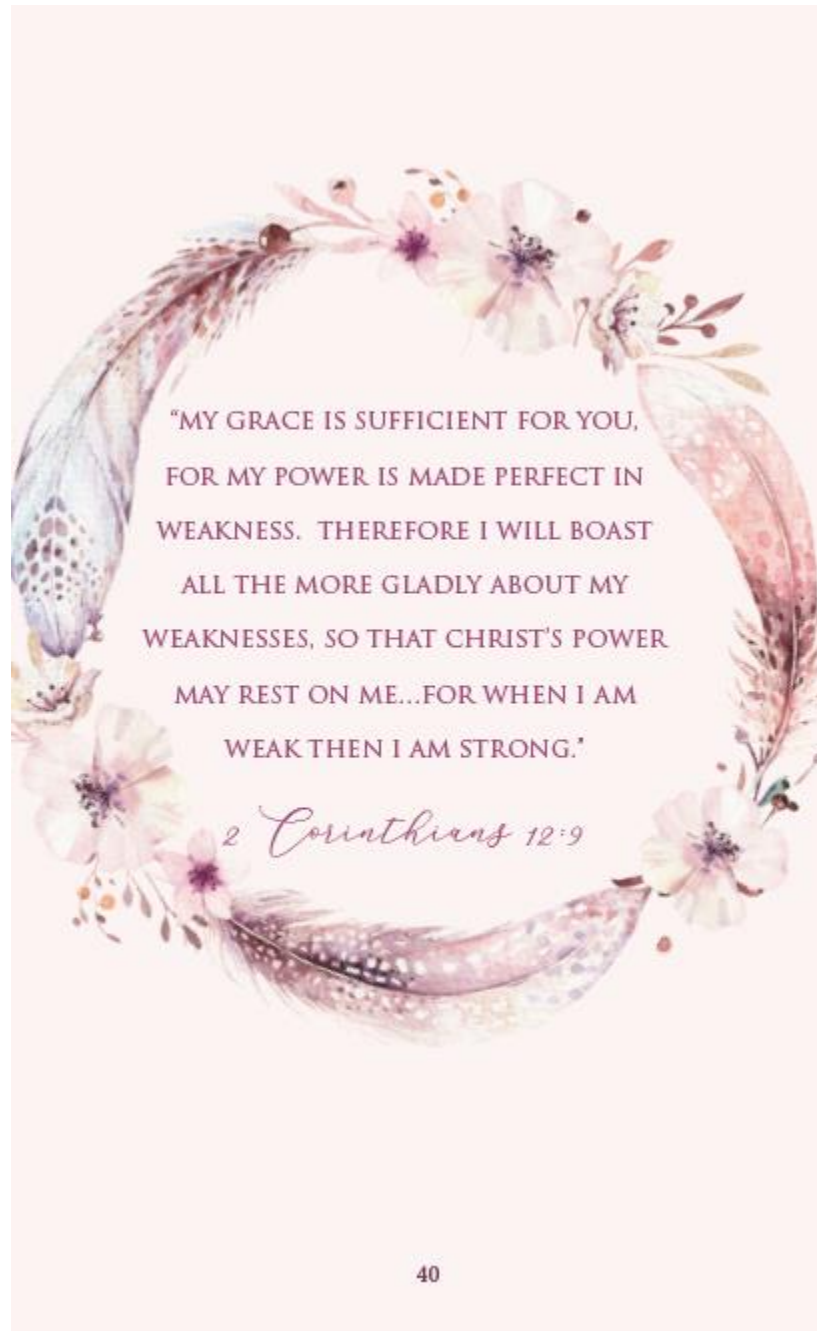
LOVE,

Ashley Palladino

"BEHOLD, CHILDREN ARE A HERITAGE FROM THE
LORD, THE FRUIT OF THE WOMB A REWARD."

Psalms 127:3





GRACE

Our road to growing a family wasn't an easy one. Adoption has been in my heart since high school, years before I met my husband. We got married young and five years into our marriage we started "trying" to have a baby. It took almost two years for me to get pregnant, and that time of waiting was difficult. The day my son was born was one of the happiest days of my life. Shortly after his birth, I realized that my life would never be the same, that along with this great joy came sacrifice. I have found with parenting when one thing becomes easy another becomes challenging.

My husband's work stress grew along with our family. Two years after our first son was born, we had another son. When our youngest was one, in the midst of selling our home and finding out I was pregnant with our third, my husband had a mini-stroke. By the grace of God he was okay and suffers no permanent damage. However, the year that followed was incredibly rough. In addition to his health situation, I suffered a miscarriage. I felt a great void after losing our baby and after my husband's health improved I wanted desperately to get pregnant again. Month after month came and that did not happen. God began stirring adoption in my heart again and led us to adopt from the foster care system.

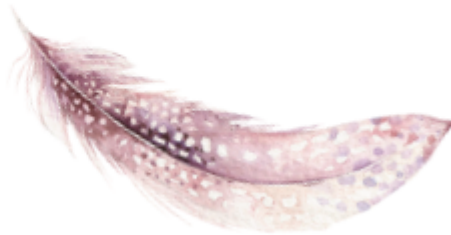
As we embarked on the journey to foster licenser, a friend who is also a foster mom took in a baby girl for a week until they could find her a permanent placement. I prayed for this baby girl to have a home. I got a call that same week from our licensing agency, "Great news, your license

went through a month early and also we have a baby girl that needs a home." It was the baby girl staying with my friend that I had been praying for all week.

That baby girl is now my daughter and she has been with us almost four years. Her middle name is Grace, and God has used her to show me not only how to extend love, grace, and patience even when it is difficult, but also how much of a mess I am and that I too am HIS child in desperate need of HIS grace, mercy, forgiveness and unconditional love every moment of every day.

LOVE,

Terra Dean



OH WOW, THERE'S TWO IN THERE!

When my husband and I heard those words, our world stopped. I was at my seven week appointment, made because all six pregnancy tests I'd taken showed positive and I was sick. REALLY sick. I thought naively that I made it past the morning sickness, but it hit me like a truck the week before. Before I went in for an ultrasound, my OB said, "let's just be sure there's only one in there." I couldn't believe she would JOKE about something so insane, so OUTSIDE my plan! So when we went next door for the ultrasound and she said "Oh wow! There's two in there!" I immediately thought, NO WAY. This wasn't happening. I couldn't carry TWINS! I'm small, there's no place for them to go. All the risks. All the things that could go wrong. All the worries! How could God do this? It wasn't what we planned for! We got pregnant right away and God gave us TWO?!?! We don't even know how to take care of one! Doubt, fear, worry... that was all that was on my mind.

If you are a new mom, your friends and your village are essential. My community group of girls continually showed up and told me that God had this amazing plan, and that I was meant to be a twin mom. They knew that I had the strength, and to this day, I won't ever forget their kind words and encouragement. They prayed for me. They did it when I didn't feel like I knew how.

The book of Joshua shares a promise of our God. How much more comfort and peace would I have felt if I had known these words to be true?

New mamas, trust that God has an amazing plan for you as a mom. Surround yourself with friends that will be your prayer warriors in times of doubt and fear. God doesn't make mistakes and know your new precious baby (or babies) are so blessed to have a strong, praying, courageous woman as their mom!

LOVE,

Jen Horn

"HAVE I NOT COMMANDED YOU? BE STRONG AND
COURAGEOUS. DO NOT BE TERRIFIED; DO NOT BE
DISCOURAGED, FOR THE LORD YOUR GOD WILL BE
WITH YOU WHEREVER YOU GO."

Joshua 1:9



OF SOUND MIND

A sound mind isn't exactly how I would describe my mental status during my last two pregnancies. Fear and anxiety were my constant companions. It wasn't that I didn't desire peace and security, it was that I struggled to trust that my body could carry a healthy baby to term. The days of blissful naivety were behind me, and I knew all too well that these pregnancies were not in my control. Sure I could do all the "good" pregnant Mom things--eat well, take my prenatal vitamins, go to regular appointments--but hadn't I done those things and still have a pregnancy go terribly wrong?

Hudson was our first child. What was a routine pregnancy ended as a traumatic emergency C-section, with a micro preemie in the NICU and a shattered view of what life should be. An undiagnosed uterine malformation caused Hudson to make a sudden, abrupt exit out of my womb at 25 ½ weeks. There were other complications after birth and after seven short days he peacefully left my arms to fly to Jesus. The undeniable presence of God was with me in the hardest moment of my life, and I longed for that peace in the anxious times that would follow to get his siblings here.

Genetic testing, a uterine surgery, adoption paperwork, infertility treatments, high risk doctors, and bed-rest were not supposed to be part of my journey. Did God not know my anxiety after losing a child? How could having more be so difficult? It was excruciating trying to navigate hope with grief. I felt robbed that I couldn't have peaceful, joyful pregnancies

without fear taking hostage of my every thought. It was in those moments that I had to hold on to everything I ever knew to be true about God. He is good, even when my circumstances are not. He loves me, even when I wandered far from His truth and let fear captivate me. He was with me through it all.

Most of all, He stayed with me when two little girls, whom I never thought would make it to birth finally arrived. All the worry and stress in the world couldn't keep Hudson here or save me from myself. It stole my peace. God was there for me in the hardest moments of my life, and therefore I can be confident He can be trusted with all the good, beautiful, unknown, hard and confusing moments that have and will inevitably continue to come my way again.

LOVE,

Paige Stock

'FOR GOD HAS NOT GIVEN US A SPIRIT
OF FEAR, BUT OF POWER AND OF LOVE
AND OF A SOUND MIND.'

2 Timothy 1:7



3AM FRIENDS

When you become a mom, you're immediately inducted into a community that spans continents, languages, and cultures. No matter where you go, you have a common bond with other moms. Once I became a mom and realized this, I set out to build a community to "do motherhood with." I told myself that if I wanted friends, it was on me to make it happen.

A 3AM friend is someone you can call in the middle of the night to help you navigate hard times. 3 AM is an inconvenient time to call on others. The friends who show up, then, are guilt-free, grace-filled relationships that we all eventually need or find ourselves needing to be. These friendships go deeper than surface level connections.

You have to be willing to GO FIRST. And this is HARD. Fear of rejection or insecurities can hinder so many opportunities for community building.

You can start by INVITING others into your life and personally invite yourself into theirs.

Be brave and gutsy to share more than what's expected or feels comfortable. Be okay with awkward moments, raw emotion, and honesty. Become a safe space for others to share stories, struggles, and victories.

Once you invite, INVEST. Invest in the relationships that you want to cultivate. Investment doesn't happen overnight. It takes time, effort, honesty, maybe rejection, and grace. Showing up (to play dates, to the conversation) is the best way to invest in and build your community.

When you show up, find a new phrase to replace "I'm fine." That phrase is a conversational dead end. Be bold to say what you're feeling (tired, happy, sad, content, making it through). Soul-filling, 3AM friendships don't have "I'm fine" in their vocabulary.

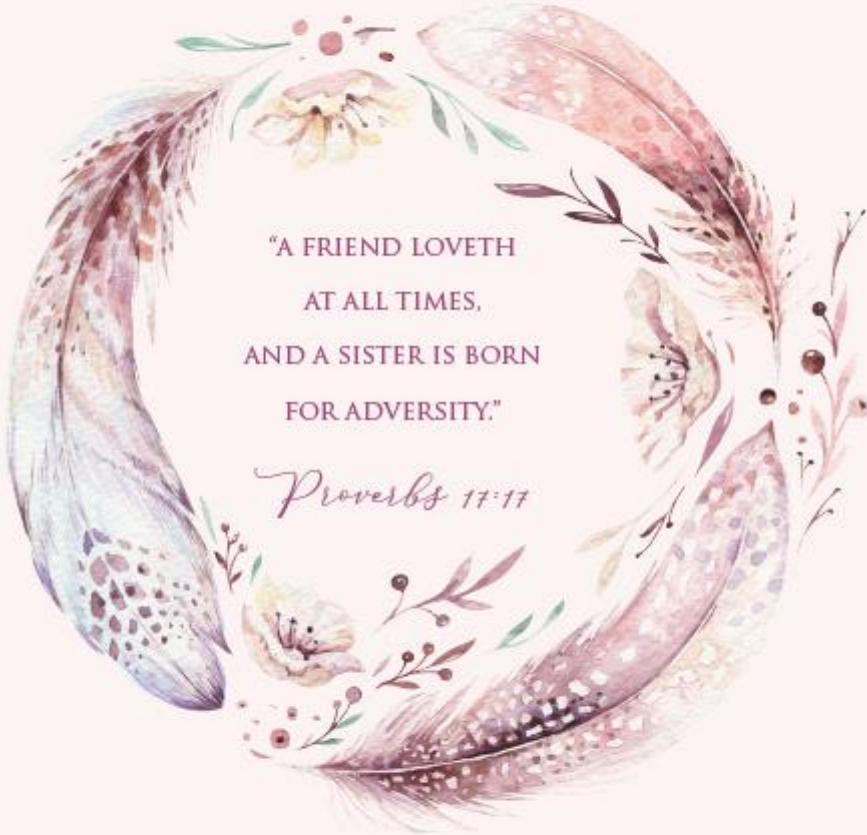
If you find yourself still in the struggle of building a community, don't give up. Remember that the waiting period only refines us and gives others a chance to find us and vice versa.

Let's be radical truth tellers when it comes to the hard and holy work of motherhood. Let's find new words and courage to replace "I'm fine." Let's remember friendships are messy, can be hard and take WORK...in good seasons and rough ones.

Cultivate relationships that make you laugh, feel like you matter and scream love as the loudest voice. When we invest in ourselves and each other, we flourish, learn, and grow throughout the journey. Motherhood is meant to be done together so continue to fight for the life-giving and life-saving relationships to come along with you.

LOVE,

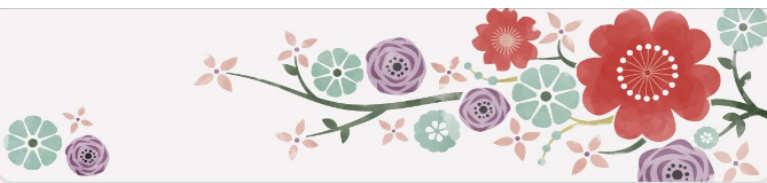
Jane Williams



"A FRIEND LOVETH
AT ALL TIMES,
AND A SISTER IS BORN
FOR ADVERSITY."

Proverbs 17:17

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The Sisterhood of Motherhood Post-Survey

This survey is designed to discover what life is like for moms and how The Sisterhood of Motherhood impacted their lives.

Participants must be a mom and have read The Sisterhood of Motherhood. The information you provide will be helpful for learning how to connect and support moms. This study is being conducted by Tiffany Arachikavitz and Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary. Please be assured that all of your answers will be kept strictly confidential. The information that you provide will be presented only in summary form, in combination with the responses of other participants in this study. The answers that you give will never be linked with your name. Your answers will be linked to your e-mail address where a third party will generate a random winner of the \$25 Amazon gift card, but then your e-mail address will be taken off of your answers. By completing this questionnaire, you have given your consent that you are a voluntary participant in this study.



Email address *

Your email

Age of youngest child? *

- ☐ Less than 1 year
- ☐ 1-5 years old
- ☐ 6-10 years old
- ☐ 11-15 years old
- ☐ 15+ years old

Year you were born *

- ☐ The year 2000 or after
- ☐ 1980-1999
- ☐ 1965-1979
- ☐ 1946-1964
- ☐ Before 1946
- ☐ Other:

Where do you currently reside? *

- ☐ Charlotte or surrounding area
- ☐ Elsewhere

1. How much did reading The Sisterhood of Motherhood encourage you as a mother?

1 2 3 4 5

Not
encouraging



Very
encouraging

2. How much did you connect with the women and their stories in The Sisterhood of Motherhood?

1 2 3 4 5

No
connection



Extreme
connection

3. Which story from The Sisterhood of Motherhood did you connect with the most? Why? (If you can't remember the exact story, please give some information. If you did not connect with any story, please answer NA).

Your answer

4. Would you want to spend time with any of the authors of these personal stories?

☐ Yes

☐ No

5. How well do you think moms in the Christian church can relate to you personally? *

1 2 3 4 5

Not relate to
me at all



Extremely
relate to me

6. How relevant is the Christian church to your role as a mother *

1 2 3 4 5

Not relevant
at all



Extremely
relevant

7. How much do you think the Christian church offers of value to young moms?

*

1 2 3 4 5

Doesn't
offer
anything



Offers an
extremely
high amount

8. How much impact did The Sisterhood of Motherhood have on you spiritually?

1 2 3 4 5

No impact



A large
impact

9. How likely are you to attend a Christian church in the next month?

1 2 3 4 5

Extremely
unlikely



Extremely
likely

10. How would you describe your religious affiliation *

- ☐ Atheist
- ☐ Agnostic
- ☐ Buddhist
- ☐ Christian
- ☐ Hindu
- ☐ Jew
- ☐ Muslim
- ☐ None
- ☐ Prefer not to answer
- ☐ Other:

11. How would you describe your Christian church attendance? *

- ☐ Attend a Christian church regularly
- ☐ Periodically attend a Christian church
- ☐ Previously attended a Christian church as an adult but do not any more
- ☐ Previously attended a Christian church as a child but do not any more
- ☐ Have attended a Christian church, but never regularly
- ☐ Never attended a Christian church

12. What could a local Christian church do that you would find valuable as a new mother? *

Your answer

13. How likely are you to give The Sisterhood of Motherhood to a new mom?

1 2 3 4 5

Extremely
unlikely



Extremely
likely

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Expected Graduation: May 2020

Appointed Ministry: Abundant Grace International Fellowship, Shanghai, China, 2019-Present

Lake Forest Church, Huntersville, NC, 2017-2019

Mandarin Presbyterian Church, Jacksonville, FL, 2006-2017

Family: Husband, Daniel Wayne, born 1984, West Covina, CA

Son, Alister Jude, born 2012, Jacksonville, FL

Son, Oliver Jace, born 2014, Jacksonville, FL

Son, Elliot Jackson, born 2016, Jacksonville, FL